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



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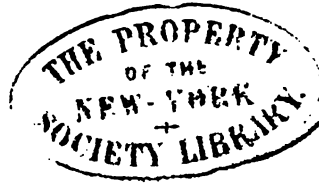
# PHOEBE TILSON

BY

Mrs. FRANK POPE HUMPHREY,

AUTHOR OF

"A NEW ENGLAND CACTUS," "THE CHILDREN OF OLD PARKS  
TAVERN," ETC.



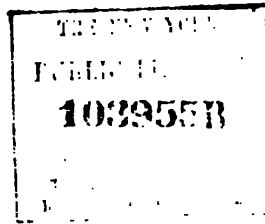
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# PHŒBE TILSON.

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## CHAPTER I.

In the early fall of 18—, the town of Byfield, Massachusetts, was deeply stirred by the tragedy of Phœbe Tilson's marriage; or, to express oneself more accurately, of her abortive marriage.

Phœbe was a spinster, rising forty, and looked every one of her years. She was lean and angular. Her pale orange hair was thin, and upon her face Time had set his stamp in those lines from nostril to chin which are the sure indication of his progress.

Phœbe had never been really young; had never sown the crop of feminine wild oats usually scattered broadcast by the Byfield girls before settling down into matronhood; had never been to dances; never had played whist or high-low-jack, or heard the sleigh-bells at midnight. She had always been serious-minded. Had at fifteen joined the church of which her father was deacon, a man who would never have condoned in his only child the pursuit of amusements so sinful. Phœbe had shared his views concerning those worldly pleas-

ures, or, rather, had accepted them as she did her church creed, unquestioningly. She knew nothing by experience of their fascinations, and it is so easy, with Hudibras' Puritans, to

"Compound for sins we are inclined to,  
By damning those we have no mind to."

Not that Phœbe did this; she was a good woman—she meant to be good. And she did not care for amusements. At least, she was conscious of no want in that direction. Her daily duties filled her life.


The serious-minded girl grew into the serious-minded woman. The blessing promised those who honor father and mother was sure to be hers; for she looked well to their comfort. One after the other, she closed their eyes in the last sleep. The farm was left her unconditionally. She had for a long time virtually been its manager, and no break in the continuity of its thrift could be detected by the most critical eye. She was alone, and in middle life. Before her stretched a path similar to that which lay behind; a path narrow, straight and fairly smooth to her feet; bordered with a few homely flowers; subject to no atmospheric extremes; monotonous, but by no means devoid of its own special charm—the last kind of path, in fact, by which one would expect finally to stumble among the dark mountains.

Considering all this, it was the more strange



that she should ever have "thought of"—Byfield's modest euphemism for "fallen in love with"—Walter Emery, who was the gayest of the gay, who went to every dance far and near when he was in cash, and who had a real passion for cards, playing for money, it was rumored, in his shoe-shop at night after the shutters—weekly copies of the *Old Colony Memorial*—were up. Serious people shook their heads when Emery's shop was mentioned.

But to the many it seemed still stranger that Emery—handsome and her junior by nearly twenty years—should ever have "thought of" Phœbe. No euphemism this time, but a plain statement of a plain fact. For no one but Phœbe herself was fool enough even to dream that he could be in love with her. But the situation explained itself. If Phœbe in her own person was singularly destitute of attraction, her acres were not, at least to Emery, who was not only poor, but born of a vagrant mother, and so handicapped from the beginning, in this community of correct ideas in regard to marriage and legitimacy. To marry Phœbe and become a landowner, and through virtue of that a man of consequence in town, to become one of its selectmen, and in time—why not?—its representative to the general court—this certainly was no mean ambition. It opened a vista infinitely more attractive to a man leisurely inclined than driving pegs for life at so much a case.



Not that he failed to see the sacrifice of himself he was making. He did that to the full. He understood his own value, and was as proud of his beauty as a peacock, and of his dancing, and of his ability, alas! to win the fancy of more than one silly girl. But his face was always set toward the main chance; and there is nothing crueller than vanity. He might look into little Amy Clark's blue eyes, and squeeze her hand at every turn in monymusk, and whisper sweet nothings in her ear in the moonlight walk home, until her heart beat so with happiness it almost suffocated her. But he meant nothing. And when the silly little thing learned that he meant nothing, and sickened and went off in a quick decline, "the more fool she." It was a pity if a fellow couldn't look at a girl without her thinking him in love with her, and pretending it was that that killed her.

But poor little Amy never pretended. It was Emery's fraction of a conscience, still quick at that time, that told him who was her murderer. As he looked down upon the broken flower in its coffin, her mother gave him, at Amy's desire, she said, a small packet. It contained a withered spray of swamp pink and a lock of sunny hair. The swamp pink he recognized. He remembered the day and hour when he fastened it in the sunny hair. Amy had been more than usually silly that night, and he had come uncommonly near making a fool of himself. Faugh! There still clung to

it a breath of its cloying sweetness, a ghostly fragrance. How such frail things lasted! And he tossed flower and hair into the fire with a sneer and an oath. And his hour had passed. His fraction of a conscience fell dead, and thenceforth his life went on unvexed by its monitions. For so it is; a man's choice of evil once deliberately made, conscience may find its resurrection, but not until he has trodden his chosen pathway to the end.

Phœbe, like hapless little Amy, and sundry others who recovered and wondered at their infatuation, and afterward married respectably and happily, fell a prey to Emery's charms of person and of manner. It is a fallacy largely cherished by the extremely young that they only ever truly love. But we graybeards know better. Love is like measles. Taken early, and with sufficiency of nursing and warm possets, there is little doubt of an ultimate if not rapid convalescence. But let the sweet infection seize you in middle life, and both physicians and possets are in vain. And human nature being much the same in man and maid, such is doubtless the case with the middle-aged spinster. At least, so it was with Phœbe Tilson.

Love took possession of her after a mad fashion that would have astonished her, were love ever astonished at itself. But to itself it is the most reasonable of passions. That it should regard as a god the object of its adoration seems

only natural. Who so worthy as Walter Emery that all should be cast at his feet? And she thought of her love by day, and dreamed of him of nights like the veriest girl. Girl! Aye, like the veriest woman.

And Phœbe felt her inferiority as keenly as Emery did his superiority. Middle-aged, sallow, austere—what was she on the shrine of such an Apollo?—looking upon the farm and appurtenances as nought. Truly, love even in its extravagance is divine, and criticism thereof is cheap, and though many saw fit to laugh at Phœbe's "folly," we, at least, will not blaspheme.

This day of mid-September was her wedding-day. It had been a fair day. The sun rising in splendor had set in a milder radiancy of pink and primrose, in which magic sea the moon had already launched her silver boat.

All day long, since his rising, Phœbe had been stepping briskly about, busy with a hundred last things, giving final touches to rooms already in exquisite order, pausing now and then to look out upon the fields flooded with the boon sunshine, and to chirp blithely the false old legend, "Happy is the bride the sun shines on."

In the shoe-shop, which stood in the angle made by the lane where it led from the highway to the meadow in which Phœbe's house stood, two men were dividing their time at this hour of sunset between their benches and the window looking out upon the gate opening into the lane.

Each was in his shirt sleeves, and wore his shoemaker's apron of shiny leather and his brown paper cap. They were Emery's chums. The guests bidden to the wedding were passing on their way. The chums had not been invited. Emery had declined to have them when asked by Phœbe, in whose sight something of the divinity that enshrined him was shed even upon Stuttering Pete and Simple Nate. Pete was speaking:

"Th-th-there goes Alfred Smith with his w-w-weddin' garments on, ruther the wuss for wear, 'specially about the s-s-seams. And here comes the whole kit o' P-p-pratts—Hitty an' Becky, an' Stelly, an' Jerushy, an' Lyddy, an' the old woman. It's j-j-jest an occasion to turn out the women folks. I n-n-never could make out which they reckon on most, a f-f-funeral or a weddin'. An' here's Feildin' himself. Be th-th-thankful, Nate, you're a half-witted shoemaker instead of a p-p-parson. I should think F-f-feildin' 'd lay awake nights thinkin' o' the miserable couples he's yoked up; one pullin' t' one side o' the f-f-furer, an' t'other t-t'other. An' it's a tough yoke, Nate. Nothin' shorter death can b-b-bust it asunder."

"Yis," rejoined Nate; "them that man has j'ined let not God put asunder, oosh! I heered them words through the winder when the widder Wilkins got married, oosh!"

Nate always closed a sentence with this "oosh," which was more an aspirate than a monosyllable,



and sounded like a small engine letting off superfluous steam.

"Y-y-you're always gettin' the cart before the hoss, Nate. 'Them that God has j'ined let not man put asunder'; them's the w-w-words. But where's E-e-emery? Prinkin' b'fore the glass, I'll w-w-warrant, jest like any empty-headed woman. But he n-n-needn't do that, he'll look handsome enough along o' Phœbe, p-p-poor gal! She's jest my age, Nate, an' we went t' school t'gether b-b-barefoot, an' stood alongside o' each other in the s-s-spellin' class, toes t' the crack. She wa'n't never a b-b-beauty, Phœbe wa'n't; but she was a chipper little creatur'. W-w-we called her chipmunk; an' neat! d-d-dirt wouldn't stick to her. Lord! an' t' think she's a g-g-goin' to marry Emery! I p-p-pity her; he's a selfish toad."

"Yis," responded Nate; "a shellfish toad, oosh!"

Still Emery did not appear. The last guest passed on through the gate. Twilight came down upon the lane and darkened the shop windows.

"The i-i-impatient bridegroom must a' took a short cut 'cross lots, an' they're bein' spliced by this t-t-time, Nate."

"Yis, spliced tight and fast, oosh!"

"It's no use l-l-lookin' any longer," and Pete trimmed his grimy old tin lamp, adjusted a strap over his knee, adjusted a partially-completed shoe under the strap, took up a small tool and began to run the little brass wheel around the sole, pricking the place for each peg.

Meanwhile the guests had gathered in Phœbe's parlor, and were awaiting the bridegroom. They overflowed through the door into the front entry, but scrupulously kept clear that opening into the kitchen, through which it was understood the bridal pair were to enter. Phœbe was in her bedroom, adjoining the kitchen, also waiting. Six was the hour appointed for the ceremony. Although it was not yet quite dark the curtains were down, and the candles were lighted. So was the astral lamp that stood upon the table in front of the looking-glass. It shed a mild radiance upon the loaf of frosted wedding-cake beside it, and both were doubled in the mirror behind. The tall old clock in the kitchen corner struck six slowly, with a perceptible pause between each stroke. The loud hum of conversation that followed the arrival of the guests had gradually subsided into a subdued murmur as the hour drew near, and, after the clock struck, only an occasional half-whispered remark broke the silence.

Mr. Feilding looked at his watch.

"Fast?" asked a guest, in a hoarse whisper, indicating the clock.

Mr. Feilding shook his head. "Tick-tock! tick-tock!" There was something funereal in the solemn vibration of the pendulum.

One jocose guest ventured to "guess that Emery had forgot." But the jest fell flat. It would not have surprised some of them if he had forgot. Mrs. Pratt had remarked to Hitty while

on the way there that she should believe Walter Emery was going to marry Phœbe Tilson when she see the knot fairly tied, and not before. And now she nudged Hitty with a suggestive elbow.

Mr. Feilding again consulted his watch. Half-past six! And at that moment the back door was heard to open. A quick step crossed the kitchen. Every back straightened as a breathless messenger appeared in the parlor door. It was Jake, son of the woman who had brought up Emery as a pauper child, and with whom he had continued to live.

"He's gone," said he. "Walter's cleared out. Run off with Nannie Carpenter. He left a letter, an' mother's jest found it. Left his love for Phœbe, and thinks she'd better take stutterin' Pete."

Mr. Feilding rose from his chair, and with a gesture hushed the messenger into silence. But it was too late. Phœbe was standing in the door beside him. She had heard; she grew white. For a moment no one moved or spoke. Then Phœbe said in a voice steady and clear: "You can all go. There's nothing to wait for. Good day." And she turned and went back into her bedroom, and shut the door behind her.

Mrs. Pratt was one of those women who would cackle on the Judgment Day. "Yes," she remarked to Hitty and the rest of her brood as they fluttered homeward, "I felt it in my very bones that that weddin' wa'n't never to be."

## CHAPTER II.

When Phœbe fairly came to herself, after shutting and bolting the doors upon the last departing guest, she was sitting upon one of the straight-backed wooden chairs in the kitchen. The hour hand of the clock pointed to twelve. It was high noon, and she was in her wedding dress of silver-gray silk. She staggered to her feet and looked vacantly about her.

Through the open bedroom door she could see her bed undisturbed. Otherwise she would have thought she had just awakened from a night's prolonged and heavy sleep. Ideas came slowly, as they do after stupefying slumber. Her hands hanging by her sides touched inadvertently the silver-gray silk, and she regarded it with a feeling of vague surprise. Then, with an effort, she remembered that the wedding ceremony was to take place at six. She looked at the clock. Surely she had dressed much too early. But, ah! she remembered now. She was to do so in order to be ready for Walter, who was to come early. Walter! And at thought of him the heavy cloud that seemed to rest upon and benumb every sense began to lift. But even with his coming in view she had dressed much too early. Or could the clock have gone wrong? It was a model for

accuracy, but perhaps she had forgotten to wind it at the usual time—Sunday morning, when the nine o'clock bell was ringing. She remembered hearing her father say, that once, when her mother lay as they thought at the point of death, he had forgotten—for the only time in his life—to wind it. And it would not be strange if she, on the borderland of this strange new life opening before her, had also forgotten. She seemed to be deaf to the measured "Tick-tock! tick-tock!" which went on as relentlessly as time itself.

How confused she felt. Tired with the extra work of the last few days, for she had wanted everything in the nicest order when Walter "came home," she had doubtless sat down after dressing and so fallen asleep. The fire was out on the hearth, which showed that she must have done so. And the day must suddenly have turned chill, for she was stiff with cold. Whither had the boon sunshine fled? How the room seemed to swim as she tried to remember. But she made a great effort, clinging to the chair-back as she did so.

She remembered now. She remembered that after she was dressed, she had gone into the parlor to look at herself in the large gilt-framed looking-glass that hung at an angle which permitted the whole person to be seen. As she recalled the figure that looked out at her therefrom, the cloud lifted still more. The woman had pleased her. She was dressed in a silver-

gray silk, short of waist and scant of skirt; the full, puffed sleeves came just below the elbow, and were finished with a fall of old pillow-lace. The low neck was filled in with a tucker of the same lace, in which glittered the large round gold beads of a necklace.

The short skirt permitted a pair of neat gray slippers to be seen. She had been at great pains to procure those slippers, sending by coach to the distant town of New Bedford. And her feet were slender and comely. So were her ankles, clad in fine thread stockings in a shell pattern of her own knitting. Her hands were red and rough, it is true. But all hands were labor-stained and hardened in Byfield. It was not desirable nor creditable for man or woman to possess soft, white hands in a community where all worked hard for their daily bread.

Before dressing she had rummaged out a pair of long-disused curling-tongs, with which she had converted her thin hair into delicate puffs about her temples, and these were fastened with side shell combs, and the small knot behind was surmounted by a high, elaborately-wrought comb of the same tortoise-shell.

The soft gray silk and the lace and puffs softened the outlines of the angular figure. But the most marvelous transformation had been in the face. Could that really be she? she had asked. Happiness is a great beautifier, and in this case had not only imparted an unusual brilliancy to the

pale blue eyes, but had flushed the sallow cheeks, and brought once more into play a dimple that had long since retreated behind the well-marked line from nostril to chin, while about the thin-lipped mouth a tender smile played, a smile that deepened more and more as she lingered to survey with pleased eyes and heart her bridal self. Surely she was not quite unworthy to stand as his chosen bride, even beside Walter Emery! And so keen was her quickened imagination, she seemed to see him just behind her, looking approvingly down upon her, and turned, wholly expecting to find that he had entered, coming early as he had promised. And then, not finding him, had turned back to further contemplation of herself.

She remembered it all now. And then, fatigued, she must have dropped into a chair, and so fallen asleep. Now she would go once more and see that all was in order, and then re-kindle the fire—a strange thing to do in her bridal dress; but there was to be tea after the ceremony; the table, with the chicken carved, and everything ready, was set out in the sitting-room. How Walter would laugh when she told him! To think that she could have fallen asleep after such a fashion on her wedding day! And she walked staggering across the kitchen, catching at each chair for support, and stopping to lean a moment against the door-post, wondering vaguely at her weakness.

As she entered the parlor, its air of confusion surprised her. The chairs, disarranged from their usual orderly primness, stood confusedly about as though just vacated by hastily-departing guests. The candles had burned down, and the tallow streaming over the bright brass candlesticks, had dropped upon the tables and floor. The astral lamp emitted a feeble light, and the air of the room was heavy with the odor of it.

She went forward, and, as she did so, caught sight of herself in the looking-glass. She cried out and stopped short before it. That the flushed and happy bride, the vision of whom had so pleased her! That old, sallow, wrinkled woman, with wide, staring eyes, out of which all light had fled! with hair distraught, and high comb awry, and silk tumbled, and lace hanging in shreds as though clutched and torn in a paroxysm of mortal agony!


She stood and gazed for a moment bewildered, and then in a flash it all came back to her—the waiting, the coming of Jake, his passing through the kitchen, she following, and the words spoken at the parlor door. And then a great revulsion of feeling swept over her, like a cold, salt tidal wave over a fair tropic landscape, blotting out all its beauty—its flowers, its smiling water-courses, its sun-basking lizards, drawing into its vortex even the gay-winged butterflies. So this great, bitter wave of disillusion, of despair, flooded on the instant all that fatuous dream of love



in which she had been indulging. It caught in its black vortex even the buoyant wings of faith.

She sat down and tried to look about her, but, as before, fell into a trance-like condition of body and mind. Years after when she recurred to this time—and it remained to the end a period of life upon which she could never look back save with reluctance—even then she could never distinctly recall the hours that followed; she only remembered again coming to herself, feeling weaker even than before; and then strength came to her in a second wave of recollection, the strength lent by hate—hate of Nannie Carpenter, of Walter Emery, of the whole round world, and all that it held.

In a frenzy, she at once fell to work, putting away all the bridal preparations, and restoring the house to its customary order. Her very habit of order, so ingrained as to be almost an instinct, saved her, doubtless, in this crisis from complete insanity. Habits are often the buoy that floats us at first when the waves and billows roll over us. Even we who recognize whose agents they are, we cling to that until through the driving spray we catch sight of the divine hand outstretched for our succor. But no such vision was vouchsafed poor Phœbe; or rather, her eyes, blinded by the mists of hatred, could not see it. Long was it appointed her to struggle before that blessed consummation would be reached.



She first put off her bridal adornments, the tumbled silk and lace, the combs, the gray shoes, the gold beads—all were hustled, the one disorderly act in the whole orderly putting-to-rights, into a chest, and thrust far back under the eaves in the darkest corner of the garret, where for years the spiders wove their webs and the mice gambolled about them.

By the time all was done, the parlor and sitting-room restored to desolate order, the candlesticks cleaned and polished, and the astral lamp washed, night had set in. Whether the second or third night after the fatal wedding day, Phœbe did not ask herself, neither could she have told. The clock still went on with its unresting "tick-tock! tick-tock!" and pointed to 10 p.m. as Phœbe unbarred the door, and, taking the white wedding-cake, went out into the night.

She had resolved to bury it, to put the hateful thing far and effectually out of sight. She had had such pride in that wedding cake. She was skillful in cake-making, as in other things pertaining to housework. It was not the first wedding cake she had made. More than one young girl had besought her, knowing her skill, to make her wedding cake, and Phœbe, always ready to oblige, had done so, never thinking at those times that she would ever be called upon to make one for herself. For, unlike most girls, Phœbe had indulged in no early dreams of wedded bliss. From the first, until Walter Emery sailed

into her ken, she had an unshaken conviction that she was a predestinated old maid.

Walter had helped her weigh the ingredients for that cake; had helped her stone the raisins and slice the citron. He had sat by while she mixed and stirred it, and had put his stronger hand to the work when she said her wrist ached. How it had pleased her feminine weakness that he was the stronger! She had expended her utmost skill in frosting and otherwise adorning it. The rose in its center was considered a marvel of handicraft. So was the braided sugar around the edge. It had been on exhibition as it were, and many not bidden to the wedding had come to see Phœbe's wedding cake, and had been promised a bit to dream over. People often kept a portion of their wedding cake until the first anniversary of the happy event, and she had told Walter that such was her intention.

I do not know whether she thought of all this as she carried it down to the foot of the garden, and then set it upon the ground while she went for a spade. But if she did not consciously, it all went unconsciously to make up the sum of her misery. She brought a spade and dug a deep grave in the black soil, in which, stooping, she set the cake with singular care. One would almost have said there was a tenderness in her touch as in that wherewith we touch our dead. Perhaps so. At any rate, as she threw in the first spadeful of earth, and its whiteness disap-

peared, the spade fell from her hand and she dropped upon the ground, face downward, and lay there moaning. But when, at last, having filled in the grave, she stamped down the earth resolutely and passionately, her chief feeling was one of hatred rather than grief. She would gladly have consigned her whole past, including Walter Emery, to the same secure and silent keeping.


It was a clear night, and the starry host looked down upon this strange scene as indifferently as they have looked upon human agony from the dawn of creation until now. The "pitiless heavens" we sometimes say, but it is their indifference that stings.

## CHAPTER III.

There was no village in Byfield. The township was made up of farms, with here and there a shoe-shop, the latter mere appendages of the farms, in which the young farmers made shoes during the winter months, while those with whom shoemaking was a trade worked on the farms at off times, and in August took their annual holiday with the salt hay-makers on the marshes in Saxborough.

It lies—I like to write of it in the present tense, although the incidents that compose this history lie back in the past—in that flat, sandy portion of the old Bay State known as the Old Colony, and not so very far from the famous rock, which so many regard as the corner-stone of our republic. A wooded region, abounding in oak and white pine, which supplied at that time many a tall mast and sturdy rib and keel for the ships built in a neighboring town. Green, too, with alluvial meadows, and good corn lands, and thriving orchards, watered by a small stream having its rise in Monponsett Pond on its northern border.

The farm houses stood near enough to each other for a comfortable sense of neighborhood, and were strung on grass-bordered, winding roads, said to have been the aboriginal paths when




the Indians held possession, and not as yet cut and straightened out of the line of beauty. Roads along which, although at times the wheels ran heavily in the sands, it was pleasant to drive, looking off on either hand over well-tilled fields, and comfortable though plain homesteads. Here and there a lane, into which a gate opened, led to some house like Phœbe's, a survival from earlier years, when the English settler put up his house in accordance with the traditions of Old England, at a distance from the highway.

None of the population were rich, while almost all were well-to-do—in a moderate way, of course. For all such distinctions are relative, and what was affluence then, I fear would be reckoned almost poverty now. But each man owned his farm, in nearly every case free from mortgage; and there was always plenty at his board, and likely to be. For there were few who had not money laid by in the savings-bank, and besides, in some cases, there was a moderate sum laid by for the owner's heirs. At any rate, if worst came to worst, he had always his farm, from out which nobody could oust him, and that furnished his bread—brown—his pork, and his beef. As to clothes, many a farmer's best coat came to see its silver wedding, and none the worse for that. And if I should venture to say how long his wife's Sunday gown did duty, I fear my veracity as a historian would be endangered. There were the taxes, to be sure; but without those,

there would have been little cause for grumbling, for which radical propensity of human nature they offered then, as now, a safe outlet.

Near the center of the town stood the old meeting-house, on its ample parish lands, and near by, on the Green, the powder and hearse-house combined, and the store. The meeting-house, erected early in the eighteenth century, held the ground until during the first quarter of the nineteenth, when some seceding members, repelled by the extreme doctrines of the earlier establishment on the question of everlasting punishment, built a house in another part of the town, for the propagation of an opposite doctrine, and thenceforth the new element of religious rivalry was added to its life. This at times was exceedingly bitter. For even had the minister of the—so-called—orthodox pulpit chosen to ignore the sterner teaching of the law, his people would have objected. They wished the doctrine unalloyed. And many, it is to be feared, listened to the statement of their own lost condition with a complacency begotten of the satisfaction they felt at a knowledge of the wrath the presentation of the dogma would inspire in their opponents.

Newspapers came weekly to the postoffice, but after all, the people were concerned chiefly with their own affairs. And while a state election, or muster of militia might stir curiosity for a brief week, an incident such as Phœbe's marriage was of almost perennial interest.



The day after the bridal eve, and for many successive days, sympathetic neighbors and friends—with a sympathy touched in some cases with more than a slight alloy of curiosity—knocked at Phœbe's door. But to none was any response given. They knocked again and again, but the hollow echoes alone answered. They reverberated through the house after a fashion that sent the shivers down more than one feminine back. But Phœbe was within, for she was heard more than once moving furtively about. Otherwise they would have felt called upon to break open the door to see if she were alive. Sally Pike did venture to "peek in at the winder." But meeting a pair of eyes that flamed lambent fire at her, she retreated so precipitately she fell off the firkin she had adjusted under the window to bring herself to its level, and put out her collar-bone.

"Sally, Sally, will you never be warned of the evil consequences of too much curiosity?" said Doctor Crapoe, as he brought the bone into its place with a sharp jerk that elicited a groan, and then betook himself to Emery's shoe-shop for the latest intelligence. For just now that shoe-shop rivalled the store as a general resort. For one thing, it was nearer the scene of the tragedy, or melodrama, as some persisted in viewing it, those in fact who always view marriage as something of a joke, even though they may have passed through its fiery ordeal.



It was a rainy afternoon, and this, united to the fact that farm work was slack, had crowded the little twelve-by-twelve shop to repletion. The two chairs, the bench edges, the window sills—these, the only available seats, were filled, and a group stood about the red-hot box-stove packed with burning chunks of oak, each adding to the already overpowering atmosphere the smoke of his pipe.

“Faugh!” said the doctor, as he opened the door. But he went in.

He found plenty of news of absorbing interest. Abram Bourne, who had been Phœbe’s right hand in the management of her farm, had been peremptorily dismissed, and all work on the farm had stopped. Pumpkins lay rotting in piles on the borders of her cornfields. Apples dropped ungathered from the trees in her orchards. The corn, untouched by the sickle, rattled its dry sheaves in the chill autumn winds. The cows, with the exception of old Brindle, had been sold.

It was an unparalleled situation, upon which each one was prepared to give his individual opinion. The united verdict was that “Phœbe had gone clean out of her mind.” The necessity of putting her under “gardeenship” was advanced and discussed. Such a waste of property was pronounced little less than criminal. Stuttering Pete, feeling his importance as presiding genius of the shoe-shop, and consequently of the assemblage, became oracular.

"W-w-women are weak creatur's," he said. "I've always m-m-maintained it, and this proves it. Just look at Phoebe now. She's m-m-man-aged that farm up to a certain p'int a-a-apparently as well as a man could. But m-m-mark. There w-w-was a man. T-t-to be sure, th' ole deacon wa'n't good for much at the l-l-latter eend, but jest t' set in the chimley corner an' sleep. B-b-but he was there; ready t' wake up an' give his advice when 'twas w-w-wanted. Th' b-b-balance wheel in the consarn. An' fur a spell after he d-d-died things kep' a goin', jest as a m-m-mill wheel will fur a spell after th' water-power is shet off. Yes, I s-s-say it, an' I m-m-maintain it: women are w-w-weak creatur's."

"Weak as they are, Pete," said the doctor, "they'll be too much for you yet. You're just the man to fall a prey to some one of 'em."

Pete snorted, and would have replied. But Abram Bourne, who was present, and whose attitude of mind toward the recreant bridegroom was little short of murderous, cut him off.

"She'd 'a' done well enough if she'd 'a' let Emery alone, th' good-fur-nothin' skunk! I sh'd like t' see him tarred and feathered and rid out o' town on a rail," a summary judicial process that seems to commend itself at times to minds more enlightened than Abram's.

"First catch your fowl," said the doctor; "I suppose we're all of one mind so far as Emery is concerned."

"W-w-women are weak creatur's," said Pete, trotting out his hobby another pace or two. "It t-t-takes mighty little to take 'em in. A han'-some g-g-gasbag's enough. An' they take n-n-nat'rally to a man, an' it's all well enough if they d-d-don't take t' th' wrong one."

"I sometimes think, Pete," said the doctor, "you must have met with a disappointment; you talk about women like a disappointed man."

A burst of laughter followed this sally, under cover of which Pete pegged away, and recovered from his momentary confusion. Was it possible that the doctor knew that he had once offered himself and his bench to Phœbe? Doctors, confound 'em, knew 'most everything! Phœbe had said "no" good-naturedly. She did not wish to change her situation, she said; and she had never told of it, so far as he knew, for which grace on her part Pete had always felt grateful.

"Wal, woman or man," said Abram, "I could cuss if 'twould do any good, to see all that good corn sp'ilin', an' them caows I've tuk sech pride a-raisin' all sold off, an' fetchin' nothin' t' speak of. There's that Ayrshire heifer comin' in in December. I'm ashamed t' tell what she fetched. But ole Brindle I couldn't sell. She was dropped an' bred on the farm, an' I couldn't make up my mind t' drive the crittur off. An' seems jest as if she sensed what was goin' on—an' tuk to mooin' like a possessed crittur, an' I left her. I stepped up an' milked her the fust

mornin' after I quit, but Miss Tilson, she just tuk the pail o' milk an' tipped it bottom up'ards, an' I tuk the hint, and ain't been a-nigh her sence."

"You took such pride in!" remarked Uncle Jabez, wagging his white and trembling old head wrathfully at Abram. "Ole deacon Tilson did more t' improve Byfield stock than all the Abram Bournes that ever were born, or ever will be. An' he begun small. But he was a steady, savin' man. A leetle clost mebbe, but he wa'n't what y'd call graspin'. He wa'n't none o' y'r schemers. If he wanted every cent due him, he paid every 'man 'his due. An' to think 'I've lived to see his hard savin's wastin' like the dew, and an Abram Bourne talkin' about his pride in 'em!"

"The old deacon's been heard from," remarked Jo Sears, abruptly, wishing to put a spoke into Uncle Jabez's wheel, who was going it rather hard on Abram, he thought. Besides, Jo was the licensed wit of Byfield.

"Heerd from!" ejaculated Abram, and everybody turned a startled glance upon the speaker. It was not a comfortable piece of news, nor a credible, in those days before modern spiritualism professed to make such a communication as easy as telephoning. "Heerd from!" said Abram, a second time; "an' what does he want?" the one question naturally arising to the lips of the deacon's old serving man.

"Wants his thin coat sent on d'rectly. The climate's warm," replied Jo, with great gravity.

There was an instant's hush, then a burst of laughter, and the pipes, removed in the surprise of the first communication, were put back. But Uncle Jabez did not laugh; he glared at Jo, and the palsied movement of his head accentuated his speech as he said: "Young man, for every idle word you speak, you shall give account at the Day of Judgment." Whereat Jo winked at the doctor, who was shaking his fat sides over the jest, the grim flavor of which hugely tickled his mental palate.

Deacon Tilson's thin alpaca coat had been a joke of long standing. It blossomed out regularly with the roses in June, and, like those, was supposed to indicate that summer had fairly set in; and it had seen its silver wedding.

'And they say,' continued Jo, "the old Major's ravin'. He's goin' to cut Nannie off with a cent. Lawyer Beale's been over makin' his will. He's goin' to leave his money to a Society for the Regeneration of the Heathen."

Major Carpenter was not a native of Byfield, and little was known concerning his former life, or the source of his property. When he bought the Manter place it was vaguely rumored that he came from somewhere Down East, that mythical region that retreats like a mirage before the seeker, and finally disappears altogether at the jumping-off place in Nova Scotia; also that he had "spekilated," which word on the tongue of the country folk indicated any form of theft,

from cribbing out of your neighbor's cornfield to highway robbery. His wife, the mother of Nannie, had died when the latter was eight. His marriage took place late in life, just prior to his settlement in Byfield. It was said to have been his first, though of that Sally Pike often expressed doubt.

But further than the fact of his marriage Sally was unable to penetrate into his past life. For the Major favored neither women nor their gossip. He struck at all forms of Petticoat Governance, and had no doubts as to the correct exegesis of Ephesians v. 22-24.

His wife was a pale, sad-faced woman, always nervously fearful lest she should offend him, scrupulously hiding from him any incident or accident, however trivial, that she thought might bring down upon her the lightning of his wrath, ready to strike at the slightest provocation. Nannie had a vivid recollection of many such, and of the injunction "not to let father know." She remembered the day when she was six, the day the quince preserve was upset. The Major had already expressed himself in his choicest language in regard to the amount of sugar required for it. It was his custom to discourse upon his wife's "extravagance" while partaking of the fruits thereof. It belonged to his system of keeping his womenfolk under. And on this occasion, what with that and the fear lest her preserve might not come out right—for she was one of those timorous

women who, under the best of circumstances, are distrustful of themselves—in her anxious nervousness she set the stone jar containing the preserve too near the edge of the table, and over it went, deluging the kitchen floor with the rich syrup in which floated the amber quince.

“Lock the door, child, quick, so’s your father shan’t come in before it’s cleared up,” she said to Nannie.

She knew he would swear if he found the outer door locked, but anything was preferable to the storm that would break over her head should he see the wasted preserve. Nannie always remembered the tremulous haste with which it was scooped up, and the long-drawn breath of relief when all trace of the accident had been removed, and “father” had not come home. It took a good deal of diplomacy of the lower and Machiavellian kind to replace the quince without his knowledge. Surely, the recording angel must blot out with a tear these and the thousand lapses from truthfulness which are and must ever be the weak refuges of all such sufferers from domestic tyranny!

Such incidents were of daily occurrence, and the poor woman went at last gladly to her rest, dying with the meek submissiveness that had characterized every other act of her life, and nervously anxious to the last moment lest father should be “put out.”

With the Manter estate the Major had bought the pew in the old meeting-house that went with

it, and with his family attended assiduously on the Sunday services. A report went abroad at one time that he was about to unite with the church. But the majority were incredulous of the truth of it, and Jo Sears had remarked that the Major would never be able to get through the preliminary examination without swearing. Perhaps the Major himself was of that opinion, for he never got further than coquetting with the idea.

Yes, everybody in the shop knew the Major; and they all knew Nannie, the sweet blossom on a gnarled and, as they believed, thoroughly rotten stem. And much as they might commiserate Phœbe, they all agreed with Uncle Jabez, when he said in his tremulous voice, after the pause that followed Jo's remark: "Poor little creatur'! she only hopped from the frying-pan into the fire when she ran away from the old Major with Emery. Of the two, Phœbe's the best of 't, if she'd sense enough to know it."


"But the d-d-disappointedest one'll be Emery," said Pete. "He thought he'd done a m-m-mighty big thing for himself when he swopped Phœbe's farm for the old Major's."



## CHAPTER IV.

Meanwhile one black day succeeded another in the pleasant old gray farmhouse where Phœbe lived. When she dismissed Abram, and he had ventured to remonstrate, she had fairly flown at him, as though "she would scratch his eyes out"—though he had not told of this; it touched his sense of dignity too nearly. The general opinion that she had gone "clean out of her mind" was not far from the truth.

All day long, whether sitting with idle hands or moving feverishly about, she brooded over this thing that had befallen her; questioning why it had come, and questioning the power that had sent it, and that held her in its unrelaxing grasp. Outraged love, hatred, longing for vengeance, shame—these were the elements that made up the storm that engulfed her, and before which her faith in God parted like the weakest cable. Not a strand held. Had she ever had any real faith? Had her belief been anything more than a verbal acceptance of doctrine, than which no weaker anchorage for a human soul can be trusted to? She had said, "I believe," and she had scrupulously kept the law as she understood it. It was thus that she argued, or rather such thoughts as the following passed through her disordered brain:



What had she ever done that God should so have dealt with her? Had she not believed on Him? Had she ever gone contrary to His commandments? Had she not done her duty in the place in life to which He had appointed her? gone to meeting through summer's heat and winter's cold? been always punctual at the prayer-meeting? who so punctual as she? Where were His promises? Had He not said righteousness was good for this world? and was this good—to be scorned, betrayed, set up as a mark for everybody to wink at? Had she not been fervent in business, doing with her might what her hand found to do? And had she not helped others not so well-off as she? Had she ever begrudged her offerings? "Honor thy father and mother, that thy days may be long in the land," He had said. And had she not? And at this point she stretched out her hands with a great yearning of heart, and had anyone been by they would have heard the piercing cry, "O, mother, mother!" the primal cry.

"That thy days may be long in the land." Long! ha, that was it! not good or pleasant, but only long. So that was it, was it? Like the children's play of "open your mouth and shut your eyes, and I'll give you something to make you wise," and then pop in some bitter or sour morsel. That was the way God mocked, was it? The Bible said He mocked. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh." And at this thought

her frenzy grew. Ah, if she only knew what would displease Him most, she would do it. Yes, she would do it. She'd give Him something worth laughing at. And one night, after some such brooding, she began to cast about in her tossed and turbid mind what thing she could do that would be most displeasing to Him.

Two things she had always heard condemned as most sinful; not covetousness, nor backbiting, nor even shrewdness, which is another name for unholy dealing; these were bad enough, but there were two worse things, viz.: dancing and card-playing. The feet of the young people who frequented assemblies and balls were generally regarded as tripping dangerously near the edge of the pit. When Ellen Foster was converted, in the paper read before the congregation, numbering the sins of which she repented, the one on which she laid special stress was dancing. She told how, after returning from some ball where she had felt particularly happy, though, of course, with a sinful happiness, she had lain wakeful, bitterly repenting her sin, and vowing—only to break that vow, and sin again—never to dance another step. The good people had listened with grateful tears to this confession of the repentant and converted sinner.

Phœbe had wondered a little at the time that Ellen made no mention in her grim catalogue of the lie she told about Mary Willis, whose rival she was in the regard of Orin Porter; a lie that came

near breaking up the marriage of the two. But nobody else seemed to think of that; at least, none but the ungodly, dancing young folks, to whom it gave another occasion to blaspheme. And Ellen had married Cyrus Lanman, who deaconed his measure of corn and potatoes, as Ellen did hers of milk.

All these and a host of similar fantastic vagaries and phantoms chased each other through Phœbe's disordered brain, as, like Job, she cursed her day. For, like his, had not her whole earth-born fabric crumbled into shapeless clay? And one night her fantasies took such shape, I could laugh, had not the comedy involved so much that was profoundly tragic. After long brooding she suddenly sprang up, and fell to dancing, or what she meant for dancing, skipping up and down the long kitchen from end to end, *chasséing* from hearth to settle-box, dipping in fancied courtesies, throwing her arms wildly up and out, her shadow, cast by the firelight, dancing an accompanying and still more grotesque dance upon the walls and ceiling, laughing the while a half-maniac laugh, and saying aloud, "Now He's got something to laugh at! Now He's got something to laugh at!"

It chanced that same night that Stuttering Pete—Simple Nate having gone home, and his shop closed for the night—took a stroll down the lane leading to Phœbe's. His object in so doing was not clear even to himself. Coming to the

path skirting the fence that led to the Palmer mill, he passed it and kept straight on to Phœbe's, stopping now and then to survey the dry, rattling corn, seen dimly in the light of the young moon, or to pick up an apple or two that had dropped over the orchard fence. He mused the while on this waste of good things, and the inherent weakness of womankind sure to come to grief when unstayed by the masculine hand.

His thoughts of Phœbe were kindly. They went back to the time when, as boy and girl, they had stood side by side in the spelling class, "toes to the crack," at Dame Bossard's school. The old dame instructed her pupils in what is dignified now as "domestic science," washing dishes and stirring the hasty pudding, as well as weeding the onion-bed and watching the geese. And once when he and Phœbe were out looking after the geese, Phœbe, who loved flowers, had gathered a handful of milk-weed, and taken it into the kitchen, where the school was kept. The dame, who was of uncertain mood, seized it and threw it into the fire, exclaiming at the "nasty, sticky" stuff. This had occasioned a violent outbreak on Phœbe's part, and she had called the dame an "old thing," and kicked her shins, when she tried to get at her to punish her with the stout birch rod she kept for such uses, upsetting at the same time a kettle of hot bean porridge that stood on the hearth.

The upshot of it all was that Phœbe broke away

and ran home, and all her mother's persuasions, and all attempts at command on the part of her father could never induce her to go back.

Stuttering Pete recalled this bit out of the past as he walked leisurely along. He saw again the child's flushed cheek wet with tears, the angry light in her eyes; he heard again the defiant voice with which she said: "They wa'n't yours, and you've no business to touch 'em. You've stole, and you're a wicked woman."

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, aloud—for a life of comparative loneliness had bred in him a habit of soliloquy—"she's j-j-jest the same she was then. Her will's never been b-b-broke. An' she's flyin' in the face of Providence jest as she did at ole Granny Bossard's s-s-shins, an' upsettin' her dish jest because she can't have Emery, the g-g-good-for-nothin' tyke! I vum, I never could 'a' believed a common-sense, steady-g-goin' woman like Phœbe could be sech a d-d-darned idiot."

He turned the corner of the house, and came in front of the wide kitchen window just as Phœbe danced up to it, her hands waving wildly above her head, and her thin yellow hair loosened and writhing somewhat after the fashion of Medusa's snakes.

He stopped short, fixed to the spot. The young moon had dropped and a thick cloud had stolen over from the west, and as Phœbe paused for an instant facing the window, her flaming

eyes seemed to pierce straight through the thick darkness to where he stood. Then she turned and danced across the width of the room, her gown as she passed the fire fanning it into a vivid blaze. He heard her say, "Now He's got something to laugh at!" He heard her maniac laugh. As she threw her arms above her head, the black grotesque shadow on the wall did the same.

Her cat, a large black tom, alarmed at this demonstration on the part of his mistress, had retreated to the table, and now as Phoebe again zig-zagged across the floor, he sprang to the top of the tall old clock, his tail and the line of his back bristling, while his green eyes emitted sparks of fire. Still she danced on, moving faster and faster, now revolving like a top, now curtsying, holding out the skirt of her gown with either hand, while Pete gazed fascinated with a feeling of mingled pity and horror.


"Clean out of her mind!" How little had that phrase meant to him when bandied about the shoe-shop. She was mad! stark mad! She began to sing as she danced. Good Lord! she was singing "Old Hundred." Pete did not at once recognize it in its new measure. She swayed grotesquely to that measure.

Pete never knew exactly how long he stood there looking. It seemed to him hours; it was probably not half an hour. Wilder and wilder grew the dance, as though with every turn up and down the dancer gathered fresh strength of

muscle and impetus of passion. It was like something unholy—it was unholy. A true witch's dance; and probably Pete would have said so unhesitatingly in the old Salem and Cotton Mather days.

The fire went down, smoldered, and suffused the room with a ruddy glow that, ordinarily, would have suggested some pleasant image—the radiant heart of a red rose, for instance. But to Pete the glow was like that of the fires of Tophet. At last Phoebe, exhausted, sank, or rather fell into a chair. Her head dropped upon her breast, her hands by her side, and she sat motionless. Black tom, creeping cautiously down, came and sat by the dying embers, and licked his feet and washed his face calmly as after a feast.

By-and-by Phoebe moved and got up. She walked sanely now, and Pete stole away, stumbling through the darkness with eye and brain bewildered. "Poor Phoebe! poor old gal!" he muttered at intervals, and by the time he had reached his abiding place in the porch bedroom at Nate's mother's, he had made up his mind that to but one person would he confide what he had seen that night. For Pete had a chivalrous soul, and felt that such a manifestation of a disordered mind induced by shattered hopes, was not to be made the subject of miscellaneous gabble.





## CHAPTER V.

When Phœbe barred her doors against her world, there was one who declined to be shut out, and that was Mrs. Charity Richmond, or Aunt Chatty, as she was familiarly and affectionately known throughout Byfield.

In Aunt Chatty much sorrow had further enriched a nature kind and prone to good works, as deep plowing of that kind will. She had lost all her five children, who had died at ages ranging from infancy to manhood. This profound experience had taught her infinite tact in dealing with the sorrows of others, though far removed in kind from her own.

"Sorrow's sorrow," she was wont to say, and a child grieving over a broken toy was a sight almost as sad to her as a mother weeping over her dead baby. "It's a pictur' of life. First it's a doll, and then it's a baby. It's a baby's house spoiled, and then it's a home. It's a lost hope for both."


She had come on the day following the bridal eve, and had knocked at Phœbe's door. Receiving no response, she had gone quietly away, fully understanding that Phœbe at first might wish to see no one.

She had, however, come again and again, but

fruitlessly, and at last one day sat down on the doorstone with the fixed determination to stay until the door should be opened. It was then about one o'clock, for she had come directly after washing the dinner dishes. Hour after hour she sat there in almost unbroken silence. Once footsteps approached the window, and she was aware that Phœbe had looked out and seen her. She leaned against the doorway, and after a spell started with the consciousness that she had dropped off into one of her "cat naps."

"If I'd 'a' mistrusted I'd got to set here so long I'd 'a' fetched my knittin' work," was her reflection.

The sun had declined, and the hens came about the door to be fed. Old Brindle, too, leaned her neck on the top bar of the barnyard gate, asking to be let in and relieved of her burden. A mouse, lured by the silence and approaching twilight, crept from under the doorstone, and ran over Aunt Chatty's foot. She had an uncomfortable sense that it was supper time, and that Kenelm was wondering where she could be. As near as she could calculate, she'd sat there four hours. But having stayed so long, she'd stay it out. Phœbe must come out some time to milk old Brindle, and Aunt Chatty looked over to where she stood contemplatively chewing her cud with a fellow-feeling; she felt they were allies in a common cause, and together would carry the day.



At last footsteps were heard from within, approaching the door, and accompanied with the rattle of a tin pail, and Aunt Chatty got upon her feet as expeditiously as the stiffness naturally arising from sitting hours upon a stone step would permit. Though she had come expressly to show her sympathy for Phœbe, she was too wise to think of doing so in words. So as Phœbe, milk pail in hand, threw open the door violently, with the intention of treating her visitor with a rudeness that would not only drive her, but keep her away, she was in part disarmed by Aunt Chatty's quiet "How d' y' do, Phœbe? So it's milkin' time. I'll feed the hens while you milk. I ain't in any hurry."

Phœbe did not reply, and after throwing the corn to the hens, Aunt Chatty went her way. But from that time she continued to come, not always well-received, but never shut out. Sometimes remaining for the greater part of an afternoon, with Phœbe sitting motionless by, and then going away without a word having been spoken.

And it was to her that Stuttering Pete went with his tale of Phœbe's dance.

"Poor creatur'! poor creatur'! Don't ever mention it to a single soul, Pete. Folks' tongues are waggin' fast enough now about her, without givin' 'em anything more to talk about. I shan't speak of it."

And then she went and told Kenelm all about it. For tellin' Kenelm wasn't tellin' folks. And

she still kept up the habit, formed when her locks were brown instead of gray, of telling him everything.

It was through her efforts and Kenelm's that, after a time, Phœbe took up the few essential threads that bind each one of us to the community in which we dwell. For we may sever social ties, but the commercial remain, unless we sink into total savagery.

Phœbe never told anyone that she had given all her savings-bank money into Emery's hands. But the fact soon became known, and her yearly tax was quietly paid by Kenelm.

"For what is money for, father, but to help make things easy for other folks?" said Aunt Chatty. "We sha'n't miss it"—a phrase often on the lips of this Good Samaritan woman, as she put by, year by year, goodly sums into that treasury where moths do not corrupt, neither do thieves break through and steal.

Through Aunt Chatty, Kenelm proposed to work Phœbe's farm at the halves. But the bare suggestion so wildly excited her, Aunt Chatty said no more.

"We must humor her, father," she said. "Them kind o' wild spells are a good sign, a good deal better sign than if she was melancholy and quiet. You rec'lect poor Mrs. Woods went melancholy crazy, and hung herself. And we must humor Phœbe."

So Phœbe's pastures were suffered to grow up



to scrub and pine, and her arable fields to lie waste. No trees were cut in her woodlands, except those "felled by God." These Phœbe herself chopped up and brought home in a two-wheeled go-cart of her own make, and to which old Brindle was tackled. This nondescript vehicle was a subject of much neighborhood merriment, and was dubbed "Phœbe's chariot." The wheels had originally pertained to an ancient "shay" of the deacon's. She spaded and planted her garden, and cut and cured hay sufficient for Brindle's winter fodder. Her daily doings were for a long time a fruitful source of comment; and the wonder grew how she escaped sending the ax into her foot when chopping wood—a common accident with choppers, especially in cold weather, when the hands were clumsy; and that she would ultimately cut off her legs with the scythe was confidently predicted.

But months and years slipped by, and she gradually sank into her new place in the life of the town, and in her character as recluse came to be accepted, as in time we accept all things. She never again danced her maniac dance. But for weeks after, when night came on, she would go out and wander far over fields and through woods, walking rapidly, and often until almost morning. The charcoal-makers by Monponsett Pond saw her as they were dressing their pits at midnight. The first time they followed her, wondering who she could be; but afterward let

her pass on with the comment, "Poor Phœbe! poor old girl!" a comment oftener on the lips of the men than the women.

Coming home from these tramps, she would throw herself exhausted upon the bed, and, after a heavy sleep, awake, wondering at her torn garments and muddy shoes. These, however, were finally abandoned, and she sank into an apathetic state, deeply tinged at times with gloom, from which Aunt Chatty found it impossible to rouse her. But her friendly efforts to do so never ceased. For her hope, like her faith, was infinite.

Phœbe had never before worked for hire. But now for the little money she required she spun stocking yarn for the wives of those farmers who still kept sheep, and got in an occasional web, though factory cloths were coming into use. She also gathered berries and wild grapes for jellies and wines. For all these industrial transactions Aunt Chatty acted as middleman. It was at her suggestion that Phœbe did these things.

"For you know, Phœbe, if the taxes ain't paid your farm'll have to be sold."

She said this to "rouse" Phœbe, when the time came she felt she could do so safely. "We'd pay 'em and gladly, Kenelm. But it'll give her an object." And an "object" in life, Aunt Chatty firmly believed in, if salvation is to be achieved.

One day she brought her little grandson Tommy with her. Tommy was the only child of a daughter who had died at his birth three years

before the opening of this story. Two years after, the father had died, leaving Tommy, a precious legacy, to his grandmother.

"He wouldn't stay behind, and so I fetched him. Go and speak to Phœbe, Tommy," she said, anxiously watching his reception.

But Tommy came forward unhesitatingly. "I like you," he said, with that strange unreasonableness of children, who often express liking where least expected. "I can say, 'How doth the little busy bee,' " and, striking an attitude, he went through it manfully, looking up into Phœbe's face with a confident air of being acceptable. Phœbe, however, gave no sign of interest in him or his performance, but his grandmother was satisfied that she did not repulse him. And in time he came to act as the little Mercury between the two.

Between herself and Phœbe, no word was ever spoken concerning the latter's affliction. Aunt Chatty still "humored her." In the course of time, others, encouraged by the fact that Aunt Chatty was or seemed acceptable, made friendly advances, but were received with such acrimony that they made no second attempt.

There were still days when she would sit abased, rebellious, rending her garments, and crying out, "Why did this thing come upon me!" And she hated with a bitter and lasting hatred Walter Emery and the partner in his perjury, Nannie Carpenter.

## CHAPTER VI.

It was again early September, five years from that disastrous day, and Phoebe, who had been blackberrying since morning in the Ridge pasture three miles away, was slowly making her way home 'cross lots. The day had been hot, her well-filled basket was heavy, and she was very weary. She plodded on, stumbling in the clayey cart-tracks full of holes made by the oxen's feet in the spring when the clay was full of water, and afterward baked by the summer's sun to the hardness of pottery. It was all alike to her, however, whether her way lay there or on the soft brown needles and in the cool, sweet shade of the pines.

Jo Sears passed her, whistling blithely:

"I'll bet my money on a bob-tailed nag,  
Somebody'll bet on the bay."

He was hasting happily home to the wife not long wedded.

Equally cheerful was the rattle of the falling bars in a neighboring field whither Willie Todd had come to fetch Squire Palmer's cows. His thoughts, too, were upon home. So were those of the dog who looked up into his face and wagged his tail. "Hy, old Boss!" said Willie, "we'll have another go at that woodchuck after supper."

Two little girls came by and looked shyly at



Phoebe from under their sunbonnets. Each carried a pint tin pail filled with late upland huckleberries. Over these mother herself would strain the milk warm from the cow for their suppers.

The very heavens were suggestive of home and rest, with half a dozen crows flapping lazily nestward, and the sun about to betake himself to his scriptural "chambers." But no thoughts of homecoming illuminated the dark recesses of Phoebe's soul. She was in one of her worst moods.

She came to the fence that enclosed the meadow wherein her house stood, and, leaning her basket upon it, pushed back her sunbonnet. Her face was flushed with heat and streaked with sweat—a hard face. She gazed vacantly before her.

To a stranger coming upon it at this hour, the old homestead, its warm grays flushed with the rays of the setting sun, its small window-panes ablaze with their glory, would have seemed the chosen abode of content. Over one gable drooped the pendulous branches of an elm under whose vast canopy the whole house might have snugly nestled.

The day was already beginning to cool, and from the mill stream, over where the gray shingles of the mill-roof stood out against a background of orchard boughs, filmy opaque mists were rising and spreading over the meadow. A

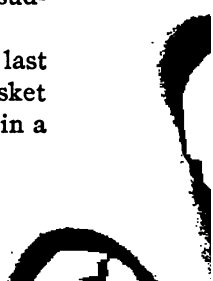
scarlet dash here and there proclaimed the habitat of the swamp maple, the vanguard of autumn. And along the fences grew a tangle of asters of all sizes and every gradation of purple and gold, which, mingled with the plumes of golden rod, royally fringed the browning autumnal fields.

The air vibrated with the notes of multitudinous insects, among which swallows were hawking, silhouetted against the luminous western sky. But the quiet beauty of it all was lost upon Phœbe; she saw it not; she saw only her own dark visions, offspring of her discordant spirit.

She climbed the fence, and, retaking her basket, walked slowly across the meadow. As she drew near the house she noticed that the back door was open. She had locked it when she came away, and put the key under the doorstone, in accordance with a custom of her father's time, still mechanically kept up. She wondered vaguely to see it open, but did not hasten her steps. So long had it been since any but Aunt Chatty and Tommy had entered her door that it was not in her thought to conceive of anyone doing so. If she made any explanation to herself, it was that she probably forgot to lock it.

But as she stepped upon the door stone she suddenly stopped and threw up her hands.

"Mercy on us!" she exclaimed, startled at last out of her morbid introspection. The basket dropped, tipped, and the berries poured out in a



ruddy tide that would have pleased an artist's eye. Phœbe herself at that moment offered an admirable subject for the caricaturist. Her sunbonnet still hung down her back by the strings. Her short, scant skirt of chocolate-brown calico displayed a pair of feet encased in an old pair of boots that had been her father's. A battered old tin pail, into which she picked her berries, hung from a leather belt at her waist. Amazement was expressed in every line of her angular face and figure.

She unstrapped the belt, and the tin pail dropped with a loud clang. "Mercy on us!" she ejaculated a second time with increased fervor, and her third "Mercy on us!" had all the force of an explosive. And these continued to go off like a succession of firecrackers, as she crossed the kitchen floor to where, on the center of the great rag rug, sat a baby girl of two or thereabouts.

She was playing with the black tom, who, in his now remote youth, had received for his prowess the name of "Rats," and who hated children, only tolerating Aunt Chatty's Tommy at a distance of his own choosing, but who was circling happily round this one, rubbing shoulders and purring loudly, while she made delighted grabs at his tail.

The noise of the falling pail startled the child, and as Phœbe came up to her, she left off playing with Rats, and putting up her lips began to whimper. Phœbe looked down upon her, but did

not speak until the whimper broke out into a loud wail, and the little one put up her arms to be taken. Then, "Mercy on us!" she again ejaculated, and stooping, lifted her up, and as she still continued to cry, began to walk awkwardly to and fro, vaguely recalling that this was a sedative much in favor with refractory babies.

It failed, however, in this case, and at last, the cries increasing in volume, and at her wits' end, Phœbe began to hum an air of an uncertain nature and in a raucous voice, such as a crow might use in rivalry of a linnet, and which would have been excruciating to an adult ear. But babies are not musically critical, and the tune, if tune it may be called, had the proposed effect; and the wail, gradually lessening, merged into a croon, and the small head fell on Phœbe's shoulder, and nestled into the skinny neck, as though it had been the sweetest of mother-nests. But when, thinking her at last asleep, she essayed to lay her down, the wail broke out afresh.

"Mercy on us!" ejaculated Phœbe, but this time the exclamation was expressive of dismay rather than amazement. "There, there, there! What shall I do? There, there! Where is her mother? and why don't she come for her? and what's she left her here for? There, there! O, good gracious me!" varying her oath, and patting baby's back, and jerking her up and down, and to and fro, after the approved fashion of old nurses.

"Mi'k," said baby, at last, with grieving lips and eyes swimming in tears. "Mi'k," and burst out again.

Here was something tangible, practical, a want that Phœbe could supply. "Thank goodness!" and seizing a tin cup that hung above the sink, she hastened out to old Brindle, who was waiting to be milked. Holding the child with one hand, she quickly filled the cup with the other, baby watching the process in open-eyed wonder; and when Phœbe held it up, she instantly plunged her rosy mouth into the fragrant mess, and sucked away, draining the last drop with a long-drawn sigh of infinite satisfaction. But "Mi'k" she cried again, and the cup was filled and emptied a second time, after which she was graciously pleased—as they say of royalty, and what is more imperious than babyhood?—to trot about on the grass with Rats while Phœbe finished milking.


She declined, however, to be left out of the other chores, and assisted at the feeding of the hens, the splitting of kindling, and bringing in of the wood, as well as at the preparation of Phœbe's frugal supper, during all which she was carried on Phœbe's arms, which at last fairly ached with its unwonted burden. As to the spilled berries, Chanticleer and his harem scratched them over and about, and so Mrs. Palmer's wine came to naught.

The heat of the day had given place to the chill of a September evening, and as Phœbe finished

the last chore and prepared to sit down, she threw a handful of hemlock chips and bark on the dying embers over which she had boiled her teakettle. For her own comfort she would not have done this; but baby was to be undressed, that was now evident. No one had come for her, and though Phœbe strained her eyes at the door, in the vain hope of catching sight of some one through the dusk now settling upon the meadow, it was apparent no one intended to come.

She shut and bolted her door, and drew up to the fire a low rocking-chair, which, as it swayed to and fro, emitted a subdued screech highly pleasing to an infantile ear. And baby, showing symptoms of dropping off, Phœbe was forced to consider the subject of a nightgown. Could she, by skillful taking in, adapt one of her own to baby's use, or should she wrap her in a blanket?

Glancing about in her perplexity, she caught sight of a small band-box in a chair by the clock, revealed by the now bright firelight. She opened it. On top lay a nightgown, evidently placed there by the packer as the first thing likely to be required. A further examination brought out a little petticoat, some neatly-made cotton garments, two pairs of tiny socks, and at bottom a purse containing a small, pathetically small, sum of money. There was also a shabby little rattle, which baby instantly grabbed, chuckling with delight, as at the recognition of something familiar.



She held this while Phœbe undressed her, and, after putting on the nightgown, wrapped her in a striped blanket she kept to throw over her own shoulders. Sitting on Phœbe's lap with her pink toes to the flames, baby chuckled and laughed as the hemlock bark sent up showers of vanishing sparks, accompanied with sharp snaps. Now and again she put up her lips to be kissed. Once she patted Phœbe's sallow, wrinkled cheek with her small hand.

"Pitty, pitty!" she said, smiling up into the smileless face.

"You're the first that ever see any beauty in me," remarked Phœbe, glumly. Nevertheless, she was not displeased.

Rats stretched himself at full length before the fire, offering as much surface as possible to the genial warmth. Once he got up and rubbed against Phœbe's knee, purring loudly his measureless content. He was a discriminating cat, and approved with all his heart of this addition to their small circle, if he and his mistress could be said to constitute that geometrical figure.

After a while, baby's eyelids began to droop, and although she made spasmodic efforts to lift them, her head, swaying drowsily from side to side with the motion of the rocker, at last fell heavily against Phœbe, and she was fast asleep. Phœbe, however, continued to rock until sure that she was really off, when she carried her carefully into the bedroom, and laid her in her own bed.

Then she came back and sat bolt upright in her usual straight-backed chair, and stared into the fire until she stared it out of countenance, and it went out. Still she sat on, lost in a tumult of conjecture, doubt and questioning, ejaculating at intervals, "Mercy on us!" as though a series of chestnuts were bursting in the hot ashes.

She had fully expected up to the last moment that the mother would appear to claim the child, and had ready a lecture upon her impudence in daring to leave it. But it was now quite evident that the mother would not arrive that night, if she ever did. And if she didn't, what then? What was to be done with the child? One of two things: It must go upon the town, or she must keep it.

She keep a baby! What on earth could she do with a baby? What a fool even to think of doing such a thing! She could have laughed at the thought, if she had not forgotten how to laugh. It might as well go upon the town. It would have to be bid off, to be sure, for there was no poor-house, and paupers were annually knocked off, so to speak, not to the highest, but the lowest bidder—the householder who would board them cheapest. And Phoebe winced a little at the thought of baby thus knocked off. But she rallied, or rather, the opposing spirit in her rallied. What difference did that make? it asked. Someone probably would have her who knew how to take care of a child better than Phoebe did. And



instantly, up cropped a feeling of envy of that fortunate person—the suggestion of the better spirit. And so they fought, the good and evil instincts within, as they do fight at crises in the life of a soul. And this was a crisis for her, though Phœbe did not know it.

But baby fingers and baby lips had done their sacred work, and the mother in her had stirred in response. In spite of herself, she longed for more of that sweet confidence, for more of that helplessness that looked to her alone for help. And she fell to pondering what it would be to have her always about; to have her night after night in there sleeping. And Rats liked her. She even felt an inclination to smile as she recalled his great tail swaying to and fro, and baby making grabs at it. How long was it since anything had stirred in her an inclination to smile?

And she was a pretty little thing. But here came a revulsion. What had she to do with pretty little things? Had they ever brought her anything but evil? Nannie Carpenter was a pretty little thing—a very flower of girlhood. She had held her on her knee many times, just as she had done the baby that night. And Nannie had kissed her often and often with just such sweet, dewy lips.


In former days Nannie had been a daily visitant at the pleasant old farmhouse. It was there that Emery had courted her, all unsuspected by

Phœbe. Nannie herself could not have told how it was she had consented to the deception, even permitting the appointment of the wedding to which she was bidden and, on the whole, the most-desired guest. And she had more than one hard struggle between her loyalty to Phœbe and her passionate love for Walter Emery before she consented to the base betrayal of one who trusted her entirely.

The memory of all that was very bitter in Phœbe's soul as she sat staring into the dead embers, near which Rats had curled himself on the warm bricks. And she went over for the thousandth time the tale of her wedding day, her base lover, and the pretty girl with whom he had fled. And the longer she dwelt on his baseness and her own fatuity, the bitterer grew her feeling toward Nannie. And could she but have had her own way, she would have brought down upon that sunny head griefs to which her own were but as the gentle wind to the devastating tempest.

No; the child might go upon the town. She would take her in the morning, before anybody was up, to Squire Palmer, who was chairman of the overseers of the poor. She hated the sight of man, woman and child, and was she fool enough to take one in for good and all?

As she reached this decision, the clock struck eleven, and just then a sound was heard in the bedroom—a faint cry of "Mammy!" It fell upon



Phœbe's ear with the force and effect of a cannon shot. She sprang from her chair, upsetting it, and rousing Rats, who retreated into the ashes, spitting. Snatching up a candle, she hastened into the bedroom. It was but a cry out of the land of dreams. The child was sleeping tranquilly, with one little fist doubled under her cheek, and the other thrown out upon the patchwork quilt, the fingers of it opening and shutting as though their baby owner were still at play with Rats, pulling his tail.

Phœbe stood a long time, looking down upon her. The baby's hair, moist with slumber, curled in rings all over the small head, and from out it peeped the pink shell of an ear. The curtained eyes and long lashes, the flushed cheek, the round and dimpled chin, the rosebud mouth, each feature so lovely in itself, and together constituting perhaps the loveliest thing this world can offer to human contemplation—a sleeping child.

As she looked the hard lines in Phœbe's face softened. Her mouth grew less grim, and something like tenderness subdued the wild light of her eyes. She put out a rough forefinger and touched the little fist, which instantly opened and closed upon it with a firm clutch. At that touch, a tear ran down Phœbe's cheek and dropped upon the hand. The child stirred in her sleep and again called "Mammy!" The candle dipped, guttered and sputtered in Phœbe's unsteady hand; and something, perhaps, like a perception of what

it was for this delicate flower to be cast upon a world whose withering frosts she herself had experienced, led her to say, "Poor little blossom! I'll keep her."

## CHAPTER VII.

All through the next day Phœbe was in a restless mood, surveying the fields on all sides at intervals, scanning eagerly the paths leading to the mill, and easterly to the Sawtucket district, as well as the road across the meadow. And each time she feared to see approaching a claimant for little Blossom, and was prepared to do vigorous battle for her possession, though tremblingly aware if the true mother came, there would be nothing for it but to give her up.

It was curious how at the instant she said, "Poor little blossom! I'll take her," the child had taken root in her heart. She had lain awake all the early part of the night, listening to her low regular breathing. Then she dozed off, and waking suddenly, had put out her hand to see if the child were really there, and that it was not all a dream. And finding her, had drawn her eagerly, almost passionately, to her bosom, and had fallen asleep again, holding her in her arms.

With the first ray of morning light, baby was awake, pulling at her eyelids, and demanding "Mi'k." Once or twice during the day she called "Mammy!" with grieving lip. This was when she was left to the sole companionship of Rats and the shabby rattle. But her grief quickly

passed when taken up into Phœbe's lap. Very little work was done that day. The spinning-wheel was silent, and as to the blackberries, they were not so much as thought of.

But no one came to claim the waif, and, as usual, no one came to the house. It never occurred to Phœbe that she ought to make any effort to find to whom the child belonged. She was like a prisoner, long shut in a dark cell, into which a bar of sunlight suddenly streams. He does not ask whence it comes, or why it comes. He knows only that it has come, and to him; and he stretches his stiffened limbs in its warmth and rejoices in its light. And Phœbe drew a long breath of relief as she closed and bolted her door for the night.

Next morning brought a visitor—Aunt Chatty's Tommy. When he came up the meadow, Phœbe was standing in the door, dish-cloth in hand, watching the child, who was in hot pursuit of a brood of late chicks, stumbling in her eagerness, and falling flat on her stomach on the thick turf, scrambling up to make another grab and catch another fall, gurgling and laughing the while. As she caught sight of Tommy she made a run for him. Whether she thought she recognized a playmate, or whether she only instinctively felt that here was a boy in whom puppies and kittens and babies might place implicit confidence, I cannot say; but running up to him she clasped him tightly and affectionately round the legs.

"Hullo!" cried Tommy. "Who are you, and where'd you come from?" lifting her up with a toss. She shrieked with delight, and buried her hands in his mop of red hair.

"Don't you drop her, Tommy," remonstrated Phœbe.

"Drop her! I guess not. I'm awful strong in my arms. Say, Phœbe, ain't she a beauty? Whose baby is she?"

"Mine," replied Phœbe, grimly.

"Yours! Oh, now, that's a good one! Come, tell a feller; real Injun, now."

He was preparing to give her a second toss, but Phœbe interposed.

"I ain't a-going to have her killed, Tommy, so you just stop." And Tommy, knowing with whom he had to deal, instantly obeyed. "Always do exactly as Phœbe says," was his grandmother's injunction.

"Well, Tommy, I found her," Phœbe went on, "setting in the middle of the rug playing with Rats when I came home from blackberrying. And who she is, and where she comes from, I don't know more'n the dead."

Found her! Tommy, like every boy good for anything, loved a story, and the more incredible the story the better. But this struck him as about the most incredible he had ever heard. The child had again started in pursuit of the chicks, and, as Tommy's gaze followed her, vague thoughts of fairies and water sprites floated through his brain.

"Are you sure she's real, Phœbe?" he asked.

"Real!" ejaculated Phœbe, "what can you be thinking of, Tommy? I guess she's real. She eats enough, and she's solid enough." Nevertheless, she took her up, and looked her over with an anxious air. "What can you be a-thinking of, Tommy?"

"Oh, nothing," replied Tommy, giving himself a shake; "but ain't it funny, now, coming like that, just as if she'd rained down. Toads rain down, y' know; I've seen 'em after a shower thick as spatter. P'r'aps that's the way babies come. But say, Phœbe, what you going to do with her? You can't keep her."

"Can't keep her!" retorted Phœbe, in a voice that made baby start and put up her lip. "And why not, I should like to know? There, there!" in a softer tone. "Of course I can keep her, that's what she's left here for, I s'pose."

"Oh, that'll be fun; but won't grandma be surprised! Say, Phœbe, if the blackberries are ready, I'll run right home and tell her; she'll like to know."

Then Phœbe had to explain the fate of the berries. "But don't y' tell another soul," said she. "I ain't a-going to have folks coming and spying about. Don't you tell a soul but your grandmother."

Tommy promised he wouldn't, and kept his promise, though sorely tempted to break it. What fun, for instance, it would have been to





have shouted to Sally Pike, who was standing in her door:

"Phœbe's got a baby up t' her house!"

How Sally would stare, and throw her apron over her head and start for the neighbors! But Tommy only grinned, and so broadly, Sally wondered if the "sassbox could be a-laffin' at her. Mis' Richmond fairly spi'led that boy."

Baby was asleep on Phœbe's lap when Aunt Chatty arrived.

"Well, I don't s'pose you ever expected to see me nussin' a baby," was Phœbe's greeting.

"So it is true what Tommy said, though, railly, I couldn't believe it at fust. He burst in on Kenelm and me all out o' breath running to fetch the news. 'Phœbe's got a baby,' says he, and 'sho!' says father, 'don't tell fibs; 'tain't April fool morning.' Pretty dear! And you found her setting on the rug playing with Rats, Tommy says. It's jest like a story out of a story-book, Tommy says. She's dark, ain't she? I'd made up my mind, from what Tommy said, she was light."

Baby opened her eyes, yawned and stretched. Aunt Chatty put out her hands to take her, but she drew back, clinging to Phœbe.

"See, she knows you a'ready, Phœbe. She is a pretty thing, as Tommy said. I wonder where she could 'a' come from. It's strange, left so without a word. Some straggler, mos' likely; one o' them hand-organ women, mebbe."

Phœbe resented the suggestion.

"I'll never believe she ever belonged to one o' them trollops; but it's no use spekilating. She's left, and that's enough."

"That's true," rejoined Aunt Chatty. "And you're going to keep her, Tommy says."

"Well, I s'pose I must," in her most ungracious manner.

Here baby patted her cheek, and said, "Pitty, pitty!"

"What she sees in me that's pritty, goodness knows," said Phœbe.

To Aunt Chatty the little caress seemed infinitely pathetic. It hinted of a face, pretty and young, doubtless, that those baby fingers had been wont to pat. Poor young mother! Where was she, and why had she thus abandoned her child? She regarded the two attentively; the homely woman against whose sallow cheek the little one laid hers so confidingly, like a fresh rose petal beside a sere autumn leaf. Here, perhaps, was Phœbe's evangel, for which Aunt Chatty had so often longed, but which she had certainly never dreamed might come in this guise.

Aunt Chatty was a stanch believer in Providence; not that stalking-horse upon which mankind are prone to saddle the fruits of their own folly, but what she called a Directing Hand—a Hand that guides the child of mortality in his devious ways, bringing succor at unexpected turns in his path, and she fancied that in the coming of this child, she discerned that Hand.

She took up the little garment upon which Phoebe had been sewing while the baby slept on her lap.


"She ain't but just one frock, so I've been making one out of a skirt o' one o' my old gowns I had packed away." And then she showed Aunt Chatty the contents of the bandbox. They went over them again carefully, but nothing, not even a mark on any of the few garments, offered a solution of the mystery.

"Well, it's plain that whoever left her meant her to stay, and meant that nobody should know where she come from—not even her name; but she'll have to have a name, Phoebe."

"Well, I call her Blossom. It kind o' come to me when I was looking at her; but she'll have to have another, I s'pose."

"Of course," replied Aunt Chatty. "Blossom'll do very well for a pet name for you to call her by, the same as I call Tommy my lamb. He'll be a full-grown sheep before I know it, Kenelm says. But you wouldn't want other folks calling her Blossom."

"And what business is it o' other folks what I call her? I'll thank 'em to let her alone and me, too." Then more gently: "But I've thought o' that, and I should like to call her for mother. It's an old-fashioned name, but I like it, and it kind o' fits her. Now if 'twas grandmother's name, Fear, I couldn't call her that, but Delight's different."



"It's a pritty name, if 'tis old-fashioned, and Delight's a blossom, come to think on't—ladies' delights; there's a lot of 'em in my front yard; they're dretful spreading things, eh, my none-sopritty," chucking little Blossom under the chin, and getting up to go. "How pleased Tommy'll be when he hears what her name is going to be."

On her way home Aunt Chatty stepped in on a neighbor or two. Admirable woman though she was, she was not above being sensible of the importance accruing to the bearer of such a piece of news, and she also thought it well to forestall a curiosity that might result in unwelcome calls upon Phœbe.

Her second call was on Mrs. Palmer, who lived in the largest house in town, a square white house, with three successive flights of steps leading up the dyked garden to the front door. That thrifty and notable woman at once congratulated herself upon the fact that her fall tea-party, which she always gave after salt-haying was over, and while the melocotoon peaches were in full blast, was coming off the next day.

She relied largely, of course, for its success upon the variety and abundance of the viands upon her table, which were of no mean order, for Mrs. Palmer had high reputation as a cook. She had for this very tea a new dish called "Charlotte Roosh," the recipe for which had been sent her by a cousin in Boston.

It was also desirable to have fresh topics for

conversation; but recipes for these were not so readily procured, and often there was nothing for it but to fall back upon a new plaster old Mrs. Rodd was trying for her lame back; or the last Sunday's sermon; or the profits of poultry keeping—in short, the commonplaces of life, which, like bread among foods, must always supply the staple of social intercourse, with now and then a dish of a more spicy nature.

And here, right to Mrs. Palmer's hand, was one of those rare dishes. Nothing rivaling it in spiciness had been proffered since Phœbe's abortive marriage, and that, to keep up the figure, had long been somewhat stale. She at once begged Aunt Chatty to mention the child's arrival no further.

"Don't speak of it, if you can possibly help it," she said. It would give such *éclat* to her tea-party to have it said, "We heard of it first, you know, at Betsy Palmer's tea-party."

And Aunt Chatty said she wouldn't. But Mrs. Palmer had reckoned without her host, as we shall see in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER VIII.

Two o'clock saw Mrs. Palmer's guests arriving with commendable punctuality, by couples, in trios, and in quintettes. Welcomed by their hostess at the front door, they were passed on upstairs to Joanna and the spare chamber, there to take off their "things." Descending whence, they were ushered into the parlor, and seated in accordance with established etiquette. It is a fallacious belief on the part of many, that questions of precedence pertain only to courtly circles, republican or monarchical, but Mrs. Palmer knew better, and never were the merits of the system more apparent than on this occasion.

Little Mrs. Feilding, mother of Rev. Mr. Feilding, would have been utterly extinguished—if such a thing could have happened to so marked a personality—in the great stuffed chair of state appointed her, with its deep seat, its towering back and projecting sides; while Mrs. Crapoe, the doctor's wife, so overflowed her smaller and less-commodious chair, she had every appearance of being precariously seated on air. It was a matter of common knowledge that together the doctor and his wife tipped the scales at five hundred, and extra strong springs were necessary to

the double-seated carriage which could accommodate the two only.

Aunt Chatty was not among the early arrivals, but Mrs. Palmer, with commendable loyalty, refrained from even the most distant allusion to the interesting news uppermost in her mind. To Aunt Chatty belonged the right of discovery, so to speak, and Mrs. Palmer was no Amerigo Vespucci to rob her of the just fruits of that discovery. Mrs. Palmer would never have been guilty of that saltatory feat known in western parlance as "jumping a claim"; she respected the rights of property, even in the sphere of news, where boundaries are least definable. Pending the arrival therefore of this most important guest, she kept the conversation rigidly to the exchange of common-places concerning the weather, and the health of her guests, betraying an intimate acquaintance with the pet ailment of each. She could not but observe, however, what was evident to the most casual eye, that the faces of several wore a look of suppressed curiosity, while it was plainly apparent that Sally Pike was bursting with information.

"Have any of you heered——" Sally began, but Mrs. Palmer broke in with:

"I hope you're comfortable in that chair, Sally: I know you're afraid of draughts."

It was not to be admitted for a moment, though everybody knew it and none better than Sally,

that her inferior position as an elderly spinster, on small though sure means, relegated her to the rush-bottomed chair in the corner. But Sally recked little where she sat so long as her tongue was free, and Sally's tongue wagging pleasantly in the ear of gossip, restraint was rarely put upon it.

Aunt Chatty, at last arriving, was seated in a rocking-chair reserved for her in front of the fireplace, which was filled with asparagus. "Don't spare the sparrergrass, Joanna," was Mrs. Palmer's injunction, when the decoration of the rooms was under consideration. Aunt Chatty drew out her knitting, a long blue stocking for Kenelm. A silence ensued, only broken by the click of multitudinous knitting-needles, and the shrill shriek of the No. 5 sharp which Mrs. Crapoe was pushing through the stiff linen of a shirt. Owing to a preponderance of fat, she was always in a state of moisture that affected her needles. Mrs. Palmer got up and offered her a much-punctured strawberry emery.

"It's a hot day, but first-rate for the corn, Kenelm says," remarked Aunt Chatty, placidly.

There was a simultaneous movement of impatience. The truth was, every woman present had heard something about the child, and each was eager to hear more, and to hear, too, from one authorized to speak from knowledge, as they knew Aunt Chatty to be. She at once took the hint implied by the continued silence, and began



with the very satisfactory remark, "I don't suppose any of you have heard what's happened to Phœbe Tilson," and so told the story without interruption.

"Well, father said something about it when he come back from the store last night. Gin'rally he don't go to the store only Saturday nights for his paper. But I was out o' merlasses and he went down for a few. He was feelin' pretty tired, but I said, 'Well, father, if you can git along without slapjacks to-morrer well and good. But slapjacks can't be made without a few merlasses. And as t' goin' over and borrrerin' o' Sary Jane, I'd go without fust. Only jest give Sary Jane Churchill an openin', and she'll borrrer the hair off'n your head.' And father's dretful set on his slapjacks for supper. I don't s'pose, now, I've missed makin' 'em a half a dozen times since we was married, and that's goin' on now thirty-five year. Jo"—for the speaker was Mrs. Sears—"Jo undertook to reckon up one day how many I'd made, allowin' thirty to a batch, which is a fair allowance. Thirty a day, says he, amounts to ten thousand, nine hund'ed and fifty a year, jest; and thirty-five times that makes three hund'ed and eighty-three thousand and two hund'ed and fifty slapjacks. And when he can get time, he's going t' carlkerlate how long at that rate it would take me to make enough of 'em to go round the world. Jo's a master hand for sums. But as I was sayin', father come home, and said

they said somebody had left a baby to Phœbe's; hung it t' the door-latch like a may-basket. But I says, 'Father, it can't be nothin' but a made-up story. Nobody in their sober senses would think o' leavin' a baby t' Phœbe's.' But it seems it's true, all except hangin' it on t' the door-latch."

Thus was the conversational ball set rolling after Aunt Chatty had closed her very satisfactory narrative.

"It's a dretful risk, and nobody but a half-crazy crittur like Phœbe 'd think o' doin' on't. An' there's no knowin' how it'll turn out. Most likely it belongs to some good-for-nothing trollop, an' them childun never do turn out well. Like mother like child," remarked Sally, who in pessimism was far in advance of her generation.

"It couldn't 'a' been anybody that knew Phœbe that left that child there. She's the last person I'd ever trust a young child with—a crabbed old maid as ever lived. But there, nobody but a mother can have a mother's heart."

It was spoken with a zealous warmth, and a faint smile was observable on the faces of some of the women. The speaker, wife of Jake Belden, the blacksmith, was a sentimental being, who discoursed feelingly on the "mother heart" while turning her numerous offspring over to the tender mercies of anybody who would relieve her of the care of them. She had been and was still, a constant reader of a feeble kind of novel, which

at one time so inflamed a weak imagination, she came to the romantic decision to drown herself for love of the stalwart Jake, who had up to that time coldly regarded her maiden advances. She accordingly waded in to the river at a shallow spot, but caught in the current, shrieked in terror, and Jake, providentially near—I write from Mrs. Belden's standpoint—rescued her, and she bestowed upon him the usual novelistic reward. She had attempted more than once to make use of Phœbe's deserted fields, considering them a safe preserve for her troublesome brood. And she now gave an account of one of those attempts.

"One day my Aroleena and the twins and Theodore Augustus were playing in her meadow, not doing the least mite o' harm, trampling the grass a little, maybe, but what great harm can such small feet do, I ask any mother with a mother's heart; and out she came, raving and brandishing a stick as big round as her body, my Aroleena said, and if they hadn't 'a' run for dear life there's no knowing what she would 'a' done. The twins fell into the brook, and Aroleena had to pull them out, hurrying so the dear child hadn't an atom o' breath left, and just sunk on t' the doorstep screeching, 'Mother! mother!' to the top of her voice, and the water running off the twins in streams; and the very next week Theodore Augustus was took in fits owing to the fright, though the doctor did say 'twas green apples, but a doctor ain't a mother; and what kind of a

woman is that, I ask, to bring up a defenceless child; but what can you expect of an old maid?"

"There's old maids an' old maids, an' there's mothers an' mothers; an' some mothers had better 'a' staid old maids," remarked Sally, with commendable *esprit de corps*.

As Mrs. Belden had reached the mature age of thirty-seven before her marriage, Sally's remarks evidently tended to personality, and, in the interest of peace, Aunt Chatty hastened to say:

"Phœbe seems raily to have took to her, and she's a proper child, uncommonly pritty."

"So much the wuss," said pessimistic Sally; "beauty's a snare."

"Well, accordin' to my feelin', a baby's a baby, and a sweet cuddlin' thing whatever its father and mother be; and if there is anything that'll humanize Phœbe and bring her to a sense of her duty t' God and her feller creatur's, it'll be havin' that helpless little bein' to cling to her and t' do for. It'll be a blessin' and it'll fetch a blessin'." A subdued murmur of approval followed these remarks from an old woman in a mob cap known as the Widder Tomlinson.

"And," she further remarked, "if anybody 'd orter to know what a baby is and can be, I'd orter; left a widder with 'leven, and with twenty-eight grandchild'en, and helped nuss everyone of 'em."

"Well, I don't want t' say anything ag'in the child nor Phœbe neither," remarked Sally, slightly

subdued by the Widder Tomlinson's remarks and their favorable reception. "I'm sure I hope it'll turn out well; there's enough turns out bad, goodness knows; but whatever it'll do for Phœbe in the long run, 'tain't begun to work yit. I heard on't this mornin', an' thought I'd jest step over across th' medder, thinkin', perhaps, she might be glad t' see an ole friend an' talk it over, though I ain't ever ventur'd there sence she chased me off the premises with a fire-shovel, goin' on now two year and a half; but thinks I to myself, she must be changed to think o' keepin' that baby, so I jest threw my ap'on over my head an' started, an' she see me comin', I s'pose, for jest afore I got there, she come out an' shet the door behind her, an' begun sweepin' the path, though there wasn't a speck o' nothin' there hadn't orter be on it; an' she swep' an' swep' so's I couldn't get a step further, not venturin' to step on the grass, a thing she never could abide even before she was disapp'inted, an' 'Good-morning, Phœbe,' says I, 'an' how d'y' find yourself these days?' an' she jest kind o' grunted an' kep' on sweepin'. Then says I, 'It must be dretful lonesome, Phœbe, livin' here alone year after year. I wonder you don't ever git out or have somebody come and live with you, kind o' sociable. If you'd jest take a child now,' says I, thinkin' I'd give her an openin'; but she didn't say a word, but kep' right on sweepin', and I kep' backin', backin', an' the dust a-flyin' in my

face an' eyes. I didn't want to come away without gittin' a word out of her, an' so I spoke ag'in. 'It's pritty lonesome work,' says I, 'for single women like you an' I, Phœbe, t' live all stark alone with nobody t' speak to the whole durin' day and——' when lor! up went that birch broom o' hers quicker'n a wink, an' 'You go right straight home, Sally Pike,' says she, 'an' let me ketch you here ag'in if you dare, spyin' an' peekin' t' see what you can find out, an' pretendin' it's all on account o' my bein' lonesome. I know you of old, Sally Pike,' says she, 'as meddlesome an' old maid as ever lived,' a-fetchin' the broom nearer every word an' I a-backin'.

"Heavens to Betsy! 'twas on my tongue's end to ask her what she was, if I was an ole maid. But I didn't, an' she went in an' banged the door. I declare for't, I'd as good a mind as ever I had to eat, to go up and peek into the winder, for I did want to know whether there was raily a baby there or no. But 'Heavens to Betsy,' says I to myself, 'there's no knowin' what she might do!' But as I said at fust, that baby may meller Phœbe, an' I don't say 'twon't. All I can say is, the mellerin' ain't begun yit."

A hearty laugh greeted this tale, and Sally herself smiled, for she was possessed of that sense of humor which can appreciate a story even against oneself.

"Henry says," remarked Mrs. Palmer, "that it's the duty of the selectmen to see whether

Phœbe really means to keep her. And the town might allow her something toward bringing her up."

Aunt Chatty hastily interposed. "It would be better not to say anything to Phœbe about that. I don't think she'd take it well. We can find ways and means to help her if it is necessary."

"That's what I told Henry. He's chairman, you know; and he said for his part he'd no desire to meddle with Phœbe, unless it was necessary. He should as lieve put his hand into a hornet's nest."

But this chapter does not contain a moiety of the opinions, prophecies, speculations, etc., called out by the advent of little Blossom. It holds only a sample thereof.

As to the origin and true inwardness of Sally's oath, "Heavens to Betsy!" I know nothing. I only know it was peculiarly her own. I never heard it from any other lips. Let the folk-lore folk explain it if they can. It emphasized her strongest feeling.

## CHAPTER IX.

Time was when seers taught, and credulous folk believed, that babies came trailing clouds of glory from somewhere in the eternities; and even in their babblings, it was thought, could be caught echoes from the heavenly spheres. But science has clapt an extinguisher upon all that; snuffed it out, so to speak, once and for all.

Baby is no longer a transplanted cherub. He is a little animal. In him we draw near the primitive man—the ape. His back, until he begins to walk, is curved like the back of that remote progenitor. On his feet he bears unmistakable evidence of the arboreal habits of that progenitor. His little pink toes, the delight of mamma, as well as the object on his part of much curiosity and manifold gurglings, were intended primarily to cling to the branches of the trees, upon which the babies of that now thrice-named progenitor sported and bowled cocoanuts.

Baby, however, occasionally gets the better of science.

"I had not the smallest conception there was so much in a five-months baby," writes one of the most distinguished of its apostles, in a burst of paternal fervor over his first born. Not a word concerning its curved back, its rudimentary tail,



or its arboreal toes. Only the usual commonplace cackle. "I defy anybody to flatter us on our baby, for I defy anybody to say anything in its praise of which we are not fully aware."

But the darker ages in which this story lies were still unenlightened as to the origin of man, and, as a general thing, were much more concerned with his destiny, judging the latter to be of the greater importance, and accepting the story of Genesis as affording a full explanation of the former. So that so far as babies, scientifically considered, were concerned, Phœbe may be said to have been in midnight darkness, on that fine morning of the Indian summer, wherein she dressed little Blossom for her baptism.

But even the illustrious Mr. Darwin could not have presided over her toilet with greater pleasure, or numbered with more delighted wonder her infantile charms. Already, during these few weeks, had the morning and evening toilet, the latter especially, come to be seasons of refreshing to Phœbe, her matins and vespers, so to speak.

At night the basin of warm water was made ready, each tiny garment was laid aside, the pretty shoulders uncovered, and the hidden dimples and round, firm limbs brought to light. She was bathed, dried with soft old towels that had lain unused in the cedar press for years, and then came the nightly frolic, the trotting upon Phœbe's knee to the "Old Woman of Banbury Cross," or some other old nursery rhyme, during which

baby generally managed to escape—with surreptitious aid from Phœbe—and lead her a wild chase, behind chairs and under tables, to be at last captured and hugged, and the whole accompanied with bursts of enchanting baby laughter.

After the romp came the nightgown, and the gradual calming of the mischievous sprite, and the stealing on of sleep, her head on Phœbe's shoulder, while the latter crooned a lullaby:

“Cold on His cradle the dewdrops are shining,  
Low lies His head with the beasts of the stall.”


It was a lullaby sung by her mother over her own cradle, and Phœbe wondered sometimes where it and others, together with the old nursery rhymes, had been stored all these years. They cropped up now with the spontaneity of vegetation under a spring sun. As she gently rocked to and fro, thoughts new and strangely sweet stole into her mind, like dim, straggling rays of sunlight through dun smoke and fog; thoughts suggestive of calmer days and fireside comfort. It is not strange, therefore, that she came to look forward to this hour. She liked to prolong it, and often wondered as she looked at the clock, after laying the child down for the night, where so much of the evening had gone.

Necessarily, there could be no such lingering over the morning toilet, for the busy day was before her. But Sunday was an exception, and on this particular Sunday she lingered long over

every detail. The frock she had carefully shaped and made out of soft old homespun linen, white as bleaching and unstinted sunshine could make it. It was of her own spinning and weaving, when the blue-eyed flax grew and blossomed in her father's fields, and it might have been that which led her to use it instead of the embroidered muslin Aunt Chatty had sent in, for she had a jealous desire to do all things herself for the little one, though she felt, doubtless, the old fashioned preference for linen over cotton come down from the ages when linen was of inestimable value, and was the type of all that was chaste and pure; the robe of Mary, the mother of Jesus, that which she constantly wore, being fabled to be of linen.

At any rate, whatever her reason, she had hit upon the proper material for a baptismal robe, and had trimmed it with old lace of the same kind that formed the frill of the small cap. Baby's toilet complete, she was set in the middle of the bed to admire her pale blue shoes, while Phœbe proceeded to the making of her own toilet.


There was no lingering over this. She had furbished up, as well as she could, the bonnet she had worn on the Sunday when her publishment was up for the last time. There were spots of mildew on the faded ribbon. But her gown, which had been aired yearly, though of old-fashioned cut, showed no other mark of the passage of time. Every looking-glass in the house had been turned face to the wall ever since the



fateful day when she caught sight of the vanished bride in that which hung in the parlor. How she looked, however, was of the last consideration to her. Before she was ready, the meeting-house bell began to ring; but there was no haste. Mr. Feilding had arranged that they were not to arrive until the conclusion of the sermon.

Mr. Feilding had called more than once since the baby's arrival. It had been his habit to come in at rare intervals, the one other person tolerated. His manner had something in it wonderfully soothing to Phœbe's wounded spirit. He addressed her with a deference that restored, for a time at least, a measure of that self-esteem she had lost. He never spoke of her affliction. His visits were brief, and if, in a few carefully-chosen words, he tried occasionally to point her to a saner mood, though his words fell apparently upon a deaf ear and an unresponsive mind, at least they did not arouse any antagonistic feeling. And when he broached the subject of little Blossom's baptism, though she shrunk from the publicity, she was content to follow his advice. She saw that she had no right to withhold from the child a rite he assured her was for its good. And in accepting the child's interest as paramount to her own morbid feeling, she was making the first step out of that wilderness in which she had so long been wandering.

Baby held by her forefinger as the two walked leisurely across the meadow to the gate, breaking



away now and then to run a few steps, but quickly restrained, lest a fall on the grass should sully the immaculate purity of her attire.

As I have said, it was the Indian summer. The leaves had fallen, with the exception of those of the oak, that had changed from crimson to a warm brown, and an occasional cluster of dead gold that fluttered like a ragged pennant from the top of some birch. The flowers were gone, but their fruit stalks, the granaries of the winter birds, stood up sturdily from out the wayside tangles of brown leaves and vines. A few chickadees flitted about the small wood by the gate, together with a robin or two who had elected to brave the rigors of a New England winter, rather than the perils of the passage. A woodpecker drummed, an occasional crow cawed, otherwise the stillness was Sabbatical. The sun had a June warmth, and a delicate haze of amethystine purple suffused with gold brooded over field and wood. The sky was an unbroken arch of blue. It was as though summer, loth to depart, paused upon the threshold to turn and smile once more upon the land.

After the meadow, came a half mile stretch of sandy highway, with a narrow footpath in the grassy border.

Phœbe waited in the vestibule, sitting at the foot of the gallery stair, until she heard the "Amen" which announced the close of the sermon. Once she glanced up at the corner where a publishment

was tacked, and remembering the one she had last seen there, for a single moment the old bitterness threatened to sweep over her, drowning every other feeling. But baby patted her cheek, and the touch of the small hand stayed the dark waters.

Holding her on one arm, she opened the door and entered. No dim religious light was within, under shelter of which she might hope to pass almost unseen. But daylight, broad and uncompromising, streamed in through the double row of uncurtained windows. The meeting-house was well-filled, and every eye was turned upon her as she walked slowly up the middle aisle to her appointed place before the pulpit. Naturally there was a lively curiosity to see her and the child, and there might have been a smile of amusement on the part of some at the singularity of her appearance had not the general feeling been toned up to an unusual pitch by the preceding services. Mr. Feilding, with his hand on the pulse of his people, had—with what might have been called tact had it not a profounder origin—so directed the whole service that the feelings of those most prejudiced against Phœbe had softened. He had read the story of the Birth at Bethlehem, and so dwelt on the coming of the Christ child, and the ministration of children, that Phœbe, entering with a strong agitating sense of an unusual experience, was unconsciously calmed by the friendly atmosphere.


It was an ancient meeting-house, ancient in

the new-world sense. It had been raised in the wilderness when the Red Indians were in the majority. Angry crowds had hurtled about it in the Concord and Lexington days. Its floor had rung to the heel of the despised Tory, as he passed out slamming the door behind him, when the preacher roundly rated the colonial policy of his most Christian majesty, George III.

Here the tithing man had held sway. It had welcomed many a blushing bride at her "coming out," though none had ever taken her marital vows upon her within its walls; and countless mourners had come thither desiring "the prayers of the congregation," that the death of some dear relative might be "sanctified to them for their spiritual and everlasting good."

All the life of the town in its early days, as part of the Plymouth Plantation, and later, as a democratic unit, had centered around this ancient edifice. It symbolized both church and state, and offenders against either met here their condemnation.

But whatever may have been in the past, the congregation assembled that Indian summer morning had never witnessed a more interesting spectacle than that before them. Many elements went to make up that interest. The mystery surrounding the child, for all inquiries far and near, so far as was possible in those days of railway and telegraphic poverty, had failed to elicit anything concerning her.



Her great beauty, as with the gravity of a small queen, she sat enthroned upon Phœbe's arm, and calmly surveyed the faces turned upon her from every side and from the galleries; her large hazel eyes; the rings of dark hair escaping from the full frill of her cap; the scarlet of her lips; her clear dark skin in contrast with the white of her linen frock: what heart, however care-encrusted and world-hardened—and hearts become such, even in places remote from the madding crowd—what heart could withstand such charms?

And Phœbe herself, hard-featured and grim, in her old-fashioned gown and mildewed bonnet, was an object of hardly less interest. Few had seen her since her disappointment, and most could recall how she looked on that Sunday preceding the tragedy of her wedding day, and not a few of the female portion of the congregation recognized her bonnet.

The very contrast between the two—the confiding innocence of the child, one round arm encircling the skinny neck, and the hard suspicion of the woman who had lost all faith in her kind—raised that interest to a pitch whose natural expression was rather a tear than a smile. Even the children were conscious of a feeling beyond the usual Sabbatical reverence for church matters, and Tommy, who was in one of the great square wing pews, grasped his grandmother's hand for sympathy, and leaned his red head against her shoulder.




The child went to Mr. Feilding without reluctance. She had learned to know him, and had sat on his knee, and given him her babbling confidences concerning Rats and other important matters. Phœbe removed her cap, bringing to view the small head with its bacchantic curls. She submitted to this placidly, and not till the drops of water fell on her forehead, did she turn a questioning glance to the grave face above her. It was only the startled glance of a child, but its effect upon Mr. Feilding was instantaneous and extraordinary. At once, as with a wave of Prospero's wand, the meeting-house and its congregation faded and dissolved like the baseless fabric of a vision, and he was conscious only of a pair of sweet gray eyes, not those of a child, but of a maiden in her first innocent bloom, returning his gaze with one of serene, unquestioning confidence.

A good deal may be lived through in an instant. The experience of years, their joy and anguish, their struggle and attainment, their loss and gain, may be compressed into that brief atom of time. This experience is one of the marvels of our humanity. It was Mr. Feilding's at that moment. It passed, and he was himself again. The sacred names of the Trinity and the "Amen" had been spoken, and he knew as well as though someone had whispered it confidently in his ear, that the child he held in his arms was Nannie Carpenter's. Through the eyes of her babe, the mother had looked at him from out the past.

The prayer that followed was instinct with emotion. His people had always considered him "excellent in prayer." That excellence surpassed in their esteem even that of his sermons, which was saying much. But now he surpassed even himself. In fact, some were moved to curiosity by this manifestation of fervor. Why should Mr. Feilding be so much more profoundly stirred than themselves by this unusual, but by no means unprecedented occurrence? Was it possible he knew something about the child of which they were ignorant?

Ay, verily, it was for no mythical mother that he prayed. Poor Nannie! what sad fortune had been hers, that she should, after bringing her child to the very threshold of her old home, have turned away giving no sign? Cherished wives and happy mothers do not do such things. Where, now, was the poor wanderer, in what arid desert, scorched by what fiery suns and sands? And like one of old, he seemed for a time to wrestle with the angel of the covenant of promise.

Curiosity became mild irritation. Why should the mother be made so conspicuous? It was well enough, doubtless, to make mention of this Magdalene. There was one of her kind in Holy Writ, out of whom were cast seven devils. But her case was exceptional, like that of the thief on the cross. Such sinners were not to be forgiven overmuch; and it was just as well not to mention them too often in the ears of a respectable con-



gregation. The best thing for the child was to forget as soon as possible that she had any mother but Phœbe. However, Phœbe was not forgotten, nor her relation to the child, and respectability smoothed its ruffled plumage, and joined piously in the Doxology.

Phœbe on her part was in an inexplicable state of mind. Anxious to do everything for the good of the child, not doubting that this act of consecration was for her good, yet she had stood by, with a half-jealous feeling that somehow it was building a barrier between them. And she received back little Delight—for so we must now call her—with an eager clutch which interpreted meant, "I've given her to God, but she's mine all the same." Such an extraordinary medley is the human heart!

## CHAPTER X.

Monday was a leisure day with Mr. Feilding. It was largely devoted to what may be called sacerdotal loafing.

He allowed himself an extra nap on Monday morning. Breakfast was delayed on his behalf. No washing was done that day, and this fact, if no other, would have proved Mrs. Feilding's devotion to her son. To break away from the New England tradition concerning Monday as the divinely appointed washing day required no small courage. On most women it was as binding as the Ten Commandments.

There was a memorable Sunday in the family annals, when Mr. Feilding made an exchange with the Hingham minister. This involved a long drive, and each spent Saturday and Sunday nights at the other's parsonage. As Mr. Smith took his candle to go to bed Sunday night, he announced that he should be obliged to rise at three o'clock in order to reach home in time to assist his wife in the weekly wash. He drew the water and worked the machine.

Alan arrived home quite knocked up, having been turned out in season for the four o'clock breakfast, and after the long drive in the chill morning air was ready for a second.

"What a shameful woman!" remarked Mrs. Feilding. "Poor Mr. Smith! he could hardly keep his eyes open to drink his coffee. I warrant he fell asleep driving, and if he falls out and breaks his neck, his wife 'll be little better than a murderer."

Mr. Feilding laughed. "It's lucky she is a notable woman, for Smith's salary is only three hundred, and there are seven children. 'She riseth also while it is night, and giveth meat to her household.' "

"O, pshaw, Alan!" rejoiced Mrs. Feilding, "you can find Scripture warrant for anything. I dare say, now, you could find somewhere that 'a godly husband worketh the washing machine.' But you needn't tell me you had any meat. Mr. Smith, poor soul! says he finds salt herring nutritious, and they always have stewed beans for Sunday dinner. They're cheap and filling—though he didn't say that. He said they were a farinaceous food known to the early Egyptians."

Mr. Feilding always dawdled over his Monday's breakfast-table. He liked to hear from his mother the news from the various parts of the parish, collected the previous day from the elderly folk, who took their nooning at the parsonage, where Mrs. Feilding served a cup of tea to moisten their dry lunch of doughnuts and cake.

After breakfast he strolled into his study; not with the alert air of other days of the week, which meant business, but leisurely, with hands

clasped behind him, and paced to and fro before his bookcases, stopping here and there to take out a volume, dusting it, and opening a page to take a sip.

He commonly refreshed himself with a little Hebrew, a psalm read slowly with a lingering over each root, extracting therefrom the hoarded aroma. Like droppings from the honeycomb, was the lyric sweetness of Israel's royal singer, thus tasted.

Most ministers take their novel on occasion. So did Mr. Feilding. Henry Fielding and Smollett were in his library, discreetly placed behind Scott's Commentaries in deference to the prejudices of the strait-laced among the brethren. And there were the early volumes of another Scott, the great Sir Walter, small books in pale gray covers, and fine type, and printed in Baltimore.

He took a turn at the wood-pile on Monday, sawing, splitting and piling the wood in well-ordered tiers, which he surveyed with a feeling similar to that with which he regarded a well-grounded and built-up sermon. His undress was a dressing-gown with a flowing skirt gathered to a yoke; and this, when he was actively employed, he tied out of the way into a huge knot behind. Like Mr. Gladstone, he loved his ax, but he never felled trees.

His parishioners would have told you that the parson's absent-mindedness stood in the way of



that perilous work. In their estimation the parson was a capital spiritual guide, but in things practical, a child to be led. Especially of late years had that absent-mindedness been observable, though when Jo Sears told at the store how the parson went home one night in a drenching rain, and, after putting his umbrella to bed, stood himself in the kitchen sink to "dreen," he exaggerated that infirmity; and when he further said, that the parson did not find out his mistake until he attempted to open himself the next morning, that was, of course, only Jo's fun.

But it was a tolerably well-authenticated fact that he harnessed his old mare one day, by putting the bridle on her tail and vice versa, and when found was in great perplexity that the several parts did not fit.

I like to linger at this point, for there is an unpleasant scene just ahead, and the contemplation of this New England minister of the old school is highly agreeable. Not more so to the writer, however, than to his parishioners. They made jocose observations concerning him and his dressing-gown, and quizzed his absent-mindedness, but in their hearts they revered him. They often compared him to the neighboring minister of Sutton, a comparison unfavorable to the latter. The Rev. Ingalls was, in their opinion, a flighty creature, given to 'complimenting,' a thing far removed from Mr. Feilding's courtliness, which they suspected Ingalls of aping. It was one

thing to have a minister address you in a manner that showed he knew you were as good as he, and quite another to be condescended to and patronized by a cheap fellow like Ingalls.

No, Ingalls might try all he was good for, but he needn't expect ever to emulate Mr. Feilding. You couldn't make a fiddle-string out of rat-gut no way you could fix it. And then, as to Ingalls' sermons; why any man might reel off a dozen such without turning a hair! And yet he was always tipping up his old barrel. He had preached the same sermon three times at Byfield from the text, "*And Peter's wife's mother lay sick of a fever,*" and the last time Jo Sears had upset the gravity of the west gallery, where the unmarried men and big boys sat, by remarking *sotto voce* that "the old lady had had a consider'ble long spell of it." And he was fond of explaining what his text meant in the original, when it was well known that he couldn't tell a Hebrew or a Greek letter from the scratch of a hen's foot.

Now, as to Mr. Feilding—but when a Byfieldite got upon the subject of his minister, he never knew when to stop; we do. Let us get back to Monday morning.

Mrs. Feilding had heard Alan walking his study floor half the night, it seemed to her. Had it been a Saturday, or even a Friday night, she would not have wondered. He often did that when in the throes of sermon writing. He was also astir early, and at breakfast said little.

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absently crumbling his favorite spider-cake which she had prepared expressly for him. He did not manifest his usual interest in the parish news till Mrs. Feilding remarked:

"What a pretty creature little Delight is. Does she remind you of anyone in particular, Alan?"

Then he started, and his face flushed. Mrs. Feilding went on without awaiting a reply:

"Mrs. Bosworth says she looks exactly like a picture they've got hanging in their parlor, called 'The Brigand's Bride.' And Mrs. Poole thinks she's the exact image of her Mahaly that died, as homely a child as ever a mother called handsome."

The flush had faded from Mr. Feilding's face.

"When will women ever have done speculating as to who a child looks like? So far as my observation goes, they're all very much alike. And yet I suppose they'll do it till the crack o' doom." He spoke with a petulance so unusual, his mother looked up in surprise.

"Oh, yes, I know very well how you generally get off when a mother shows you her baby. 'Well, that is a baby!' you say, and after that nobody ever thinks of pinning you down to details. But, as Jane Belden says, 'You ain't a mother,' Alan. Poor Mrs. Poole! I really felt for her. She eat pie and wept all at once; and I daresay Mahaly was a perfect cherub to her. I wouldn't give much for a mother that didn't think her baby a cherub. And it's an innocent speculation, say

what you will, Alan. Women might be worse employed. But are you not well, my son? I heard you moving about late."

"I beg your pardon, mother," replied the excellent son, conscience-smitten. "I hope I did not keep you awake. I'm a trifle out of sorts, but nothing to signify. I must have got out of bed wrong end foremost, as you used to say I did when I was a boy. But what was that you were saying about George Wade not coming home to Thanksgiving?" And as his mother resumed her tale of parish news, his thoughts wandered off to the duty before him.

Nannie Carpenter did not inherit her mother's submissive temper in its entirety. She had just enough of her father's strong will to lend a piquant willfulness to character and manner. Mr. Feilding remembered it well. What was there, indeed, relating to Nannie that he did not recall every day of his life? She had been his pupil, his little scholar. He had taught her her arithmetic and geography, her history and grammar. He attempted to teach her Latin, but she made fearful havoc among the declensions, a havoc Mr. Feilding would have found unforgivable in anyone else.

He had had other pupils in his day, young men whom Mrs. Feilding had mothered, while he trained them theologically or academically, as their requirements demanded. They, too, had often failed in declensions, but Mr. Feilding had

never found anything agreeable in that fact. Their uncouth blunders bore small likeness to Nannie's fascinating little slips. Her confusion betwixt the dative and ablative was something delicious to witness. But Nannie at last rebelled. Latin was too much for her, she said. Thoughts of it troubled her o' nights. When she fell asleep, the endless exceptions, taking the form of little red and white skeletons, danced upon her pillow. And one day she climbed up and dropped the Latin grammar into a well behind the works of the Reverend John Newton, Cowper's friend and mentor.


She spent a good deal of time at the parsonage, more than at any other place, except the pleasant old farmhouse, where Phœbe lived. She fluttered in and out like some jeweled humming-bird or radiant-winged butterfly. What thing of beauty and grace did not Mr. Feilding liken her to in those days? For the grave scholar found himself at last deeply in love with his little pupil. While he had fancied he was teaching her, she was giving him lessons in a profounder science than any known in the curriculum of the schools, though he did not come to a full realization of that fact until her flight with Walter Emery. That day the skies fell, and for a brief hour the foundations of the universe were shaken.

But life remains, though that which made its sun has sunk below the horizon. And Mr. Feilding was not a child to sit down and cry because

his choicest treasure had been taken from him, nor a willful woman to hopelessly and helplessly bang his head against fate. He had an immediate duty to perform, or what he thought an immediate duty—viz., the reconciliation of the father to Nannie's marriage. He only wished that her choice had fallen upon a different man. He fancied that in that case he could have given her up with a less severe wrench. But who shall say? It matters little at first to what point of the compass our lost bird may have flown. By and by, perhaps, we may take comfort to ourselves in knowing that it sings under sunny skies, and is not lost in boreal darkness. He had never thought well of Emery, and his betrayal of Phœbe's trust augured ill for Nannie's happiness. But she had chosen him.

Mr. Feilding never liked to think of that interview. The Major was choking with rage, and yet he found voice to pour out upon Mr. Feilding a flood of imprecations for his interference, and he said such things of Nannie as Mr. Feilding declared he would not suffer to be said of her in his presence, even by her father. The result was that the Major as good as turned him out of doors.

A reconciliation was afterwards patched up between the two, but Mr. Feilding felt the Major had never really forgiven him; he was not of a forgiving temper. He was a hard man when you got through the thin veneer of a somewhat aggressive geniality, a geniality which, as we have



seen, was never wasted on his family, and during the time that had elapsed since Nannie's flight that veneer had been growing thinner. He was drinking too much hard cider, it was said. Upon a corner shelf in the end entry always stood a pitcher of that fluid, of which he drank copiously as he went in and out, and that pitcher went oftener than ever to the barrel to be filled, and hard cider, though it didn't make a man drunk, made him ugly.

And now Mr. Feilding was again to plead with him to be reconciled to Nannie, for the more he thought upon it, the surer he felt that the child was hers. It explained one thing that had puzzled him: her being left so far from the highway; a common straggler would not have taken that trouble. Besides her whole appearance militated against the supposition that she was a child of that class. Hers was a refinement of feature not born of vagabondage, and then he could not doubt his own instant instinctive feeling.

He wanted to learn whether her father had seen her. Whether, as he suspected, she had come to him and been turned away; to get, if possible, some clew to her. Where was Emery? was he dead? But if so he wondered that even in the event of her father shutting his door upon her, she had not come to him and his mother. Surely she must have known that she would be most welcome. And why leave her child and go away herself? The necessity that compelled that

must be one of poverty. Nannie in want! O, that he could find her, his lost darling! Where was she? Over and over again he asked himself the question, as he walked to and fro in his study after breakfast, while his mother wondered what had come over Alan. At last she knocked at his door.

"May I come in? Are you sick?" she asked.

"No, mother, I'm going out; going out directly," and without more ado he put on his hat and betook himself to the Major's.

Tyly—diminutive for Silence—opened the door to him. She was the Major's handmaid, and a conspicuous instance, one of the few on record, of the entire fitness of the individual to his office. She was deaf as a post, but by fixing her eyes intently on the Major's face, she could understand his orders. Whereas when he swore at her, she could look away and not hear a word. This exasperated him, it is true. There is little satisfaction in swearing without an audience, and he sometimes intimated a desire for one by throwing his bootjack, or any other handy missile, at her, in order to draw her attention. So far, by some miraculous instinct entirely distinct from the sense of hearing, she had managed to dodge these intimations; but she might not always be so lucky; and though the sum the Major paid her weekly was more than she could earn in any other way, she sometimes felt it might be wise to leave before "anything happened," by which ambig-

uous phrase, she designated the possible fatal collision of the bootjack and her head.

This morning was one of the occasions when that feeling was uppermost. The Major had been raving from the time he got out of bed. Nothing suited him. The hash made from the remnant of the Sunday's corned beef, and after her best manner, he had pronounced not fit for the deuce, and had flung it out of the window. The hens, if Mr. Feilding would graciously look, were still scratching about fragments of it. The johnny-cake he had thrown at her head, bits of which, calling Mr. Feilding's attention to this second fact, still clung to her iron-gray hair, wherein it had gone to pieces; and the coffee he had poured into the tray, flooding the table. Since which time he had been in the sitting-room, swilling cider to that extent she wondered he didn't burst and 'a' done with it, and on the whole thought it the best thing he could do.

While she was ready to put up with as much as most folks, being a lone widder—Peleg Higginson had deceased some thirty years previous, after a brief honeymoon of four months, having reached the age of seventy-six, and leaving a disconsolate and blooming widow of thirty—and dependent upon the labor of her own hands, yet she could not be imposed upon to quite such an extent. Was it to be expected of a decent woman, she put it to Mr. Feilding himself, to have her cooking trod under foot as it were, a

cooking considered so superior by all who had ever tasted it, and to be sworn at day in and day out, though, thanks be to her deaf ears, she only knew it from catching sight now and then of his furious countenance, crimson as the crimsonest lobster that ever swum in the sea—was it to be expected of her to put up with such carryings-on, though she was a lone widder and dependent upon the work of her hands. Was it now? And she looked up at Mr. Feilding with the ruffled aspect of a perturbed sparrow.

She revered Mr. Feilding. She cherished a profound reverence for all ministers considered in the lump. But her feeling for Mr. Feilding was quite aside from that. Mr. Feilding always took off his hat to her. He was the only man that had ever done that. He was standing with it now in his hand, regarding her with a deference very soothing to her womanhood, somewhat bruised by the hailing shower of oaths and bootjacks.

She dropped him a deep curtsy—the New England child of the early part of the nineteenth century was taught to curtsy and bow to the parish minister, incredible as it may seem to this latter half—and took his assent to her remarks for granted. Conversation with her was difficult, and few ever attempted it. She intimated by a second curtsy and a motion of the hand toward the sitting-room door that she was ready to usher him into the Major's presence. He must excuse the dust. Owing to the catastrophe of the break-



fast, she had not ventured in to put the room in its accustomed order, and the fireplace especially did not present the neat aspect she could desire.

Tyly's account of the Major's condition strengthened Mr. Feilding's conjecture concerning his knowledge of Nannie and her child, at the same time that it rendered the task before him still more difficult. And as she opened the door he walked in with something of the feeling he would have experienced in entering a wild beast's cage.

The Major was seated at his desk, ostensibly looking over papers, but his shaking hands, in which the papers rustled like dry leaves in an autumn wind, betrayed his agitation. The air of the room was impregnated with the odor of cider, a pitcher of which stood by his side on the dropped lid of the desk. He was a great consumer of tobacco as well as of cider, and used the fireplace as a spittoon. Much practice enabled him to hit it across the room, though sometimes, when agitated, he went wide of the mark. He had done so this morning, and the condition of the brass dogs and other fire-irons were such as to justify Tyly's apology.

He turned as Mr. Feilding entered, and sent a stream of saliva into the fireplace before greeting his guest, if the word greet may be applied to his surly "Good-morning." He did not ask him to be seated, and as Mr. Feilding stood hesitating, he grinned sardonically. Mr. Feilding thought he

had never seen him in a more savage mood. It had been his purpose to be as conciliatory as possible—for Nannie's sake as well as the child's, to humor her father; not to forget that he was her father, and to diplomatically pave the way to the object of his visit. He did make a feeble attempt in that direction. He remarked that it was a fine morning for the season, to which the Major replied that he supposed he hadn't taken the trouble to come over there to tell him what the weather was. So there was nothing for it but to make the plunge, which he did by saying:

"I came in, Major, to ask if you have had any news lately from your daughter—from Nannie."

"I thought so. I thought that's what you were after. But I told you once before, parson, that I'd have no meddling 'twixt me and my daughter. It's no man's business but mine, and I don't see what you want to come raking it up again for. She's cleared out and I'm done with her. She ain't any daughter o' mine." And he poured another stream of saliva over the fire-irons.

"But have you heard nothing since that time?" persisted Mr. Feilding.

"Damn it!" shrieked the Major, "why should I hear?" His whole previous speech had been interlarded with oaths. In fact, as has been intimated, the common highway of his speech was macadamized with them. But I decline to reproduce them; they must be left to the reader's

imagination "A girl that's gone off that way ain't likely to come sneaking back to be took in. She's made her own bed and she may lay in it for all me. Why should she come back, I say? Nobody wants her. What are y' driving at, parson, and what's sent y' here again asking for her? Why can't y' let sleeping dogs lie? D'y' want to pick another quarrel? She ain't worth it. No woman ain't worth it. They're a damned deceitful lot. They'll make a man think black's white and white's black till he finds 'em out."

His bleared red eyes glared, and Mr. Feilding wondered what experience had taught him that lesson. Surely it had not come through the meek woman known to Byfield as his wife! And what had been the fate of the woman he had found out?

A silence ensued, during which the Major refreshed himself with a long pull at the cider. Mr. Feilding still stood by the door. He took a sudden resolution.

"You were not at meeting yesterday," he said.

The eyes of the two men met. And what the Major thought he saw in those of the other I do not know. They were clear, grave, candid eyes. Doubtless he read, or thought he did, that their owner knew his secret. For he broke into a fury of blasphemous rage, uttering such things as drove Mr. Feilding from the room and out of the house as though it had been a blast from the infernal pit, as who shall say it was not?

But he knew now that the child was Nannie's.

Knew that she had come to her father's door, vainly asking shelter. Knew also—and the knowledge pierced him with intolerable anguish—that she was no wedded wife. Alas, poor Nannie!

## CHAPTER XI.

It was evening, and Phœbe was sitting at the kitchen table busily drawing or attempting to draw a pattern of a rag baby. Delight had been long asleep in the bedroom, the door of which stood wide open. A cheerful fire burned in the deep fireplace, decorated with its crane of pot-hooks and trammels. There was an air of comfort about the kitchen, of comfort united to a sense of occupancy such as it had long been a stranger to. Even in Phœbe's rational days its precise order and exquisite cleanliness sometimes gave one a sense as of a room set apart from the ordinary bustle of daily living, and its pleasant disorder, suggesting to the profane mind that Scriptural apartment into which, thoroughly swept and garnished, might enter at any time a host of devils worse than those of dirt and disorder which had been cast out.

Now there was a litter of playthings on the rug by the fire that Phœbe in her haste at pattern-making had not stopped to put away; a shabby rattle, a tin-cup, a semblance of a doll made from Phœbe's shoulder shawl, ingeniously folded and held by a pin. Upon this Delight had seized with true maternal instinct, and hugged and kissed it so fervently Phœbe

resolved she should be the happy mother of a genuine rag baby.

Among her own childhood's playthings, the best beloved had been a large rag baby made by a tender maiden aunt, and possessed of toes and fingers, and clothes that could be taken off. And such an one she would secretly make for Delight; and as soon as she was in bed Phoebe set to work to cut a pattern. Diligent search brought out from the cupboard over the mantel-shelf a stump of a quill and an ink bottle with a small amount of sediment at the bottom. With these, and a file of old newspapers preserved by the deacon, she set to work to first draw her pattern. A thing easily resolved upon, but not so easily accomplished! For Phoebe's art fell short of the simplest lines. Pattern after pattern was drawn and thrown aside. The thing was clear enough in her mind, but to set it down on paper—there was the rub! Time passed unnoted. But at last, the clock striking twelve, she gave up in despair, and went to bed to dream of an ogre of a doll that grew and expanded like the Afrite of the bottle and gnashed its teeth at her and swore: "Fool! To imagine for an instant that you could manufacture out of cotton and sawdust anything so fine, so splendid as I!" And she had a bad night of it, and the next day took Tommy into her councils.

Could he draw a pattern of a doll? He would try; and he did, opening his mouth wide at every

up-stroke, and shutting it at every down-stroke of the quill, and bearing down so heavily the points thereof spread each time in the likeness of a swallow's tail. But all was of no avail, and having made vast inroads in the deacon's newspaper file, exhausted the sediment in the inkstand, and hopelessly split the quill, he, too, gave up in despair.

"I'll tell you what, Phœbe," said he, "I'll ask granma. She's got a pattern of most everything, and I'll bet she's got a doll pattern."

She had a pattern of exactly the kind of rag baby Phœbe wanted, also a piece of fine French calico, big enough for a frock. "And tell Phœbe," says she, "I'll make the bonnet."

So the doll was cut out, and carefully stitched in the fine "over-and-over," which was one of the accomplishments taught in Dame Bossard's school, and many an evening it took to complete it and its wardrobe after Delight was in bed. Stitched and stuffed and clothed, it still lacked an important feature or features, viz., hair, eyes and cherry mouth. But between the two, Phœbe and Tommy, and with the co-operation of the bluing-bag and some expressed cranberry juice, a mouth and eyes, recognizable as such, were achieved. The eyebrows were stitched in with a stitch which, if not Kensington, was effective. And as to hair, Phœbe did not hesitate for an instant at the cropping of a handful of her own pale orange locks taken at random, which sacrifice and the manner of it neither detracted from nor added to

her good looks so far as she was concerned, for each looking-glass still hung face to the wall; though what was left bore more likeness to the scalp locks of an Indian than to the ordinary decorous bands of an elderly Cape Cod spinster.

The orange locks made a charming wig in Delight's eyes, who stroked and fervently kissed it, and said, "Pitty, pitty!" to Phœbe's great delectation.

The winter was well through ere the rag baby was finished. Many things, and more precious than cloth and sawdust, or even Aunt Chatty's French calico, had gone to the making of it. Tender thoughts consecrated each over-and-over stitch, each neatly fashioned small garment; thoughts arising from the dead as it were, throwing off the cerements of gloom, and putting out tendrils not only into the present but the future.

It had been a hard winter, prolific of cold and snow, and Aunt Chatty had not come to the old gray house as often as usual.

"Delight's the best society in the world for Phœbe," she said to Kenelm, giving tongue unwittingly to an admirable definition of that much-shuttle-cocked phrase "best society." "It's really amazing how Phœbe took to her. 'A little child shall lead them.'"

She sent Tommy in her stead. Delight's first confidence in him had never waned, though sometimes momentarily withheld with true feminine caprice.



A snow in April overtopped the fences and lay a foot deep in the meadow. No track was possible. But as the sky cleared Tommy appeared at Phœbe's kitchen window, skimming over the snow piled to the level of its sill.

"Halloa, Phœbe," said he, tapping on the pane like a hungry snow-bird.

"Mercy on us!" ejaculated Phœbe, bringing her spinning-wheel to an abrupt standstill. "How you did scare me, Tommy! and how'd you get here?"

"On my snowshoes. Granpa made 'em. An Injun showed him how when he was a boy. Halloa, what's going on?"

For a tremendous din was perceptible, even through the closed windows. He flattened his nose upon the pane and looked in. Delight was beating a bright tin pan with the tongs.

"The little creatur' was railly pining to get out, and so I give her them to content her," Phœbe explained.

"Come in; Tommy," she continued, hospitably. "Dinner's just ready, and I've got rabbit stew and dumplin'. Rats fetched in a rabbit last night. It come in jest right, for I'd nothing but salt pork, and that's heavy for little Blossom."

Tommy slipped off snowshoes and came in.

Delight stilled banged milk-pan with tongs, and deigned no response to his greeting. The smell of the stew escaping from the pot was savory; the kitchen warm and bright with sun-

shine. Never was room framed by mortal man so redolent of homely comfort, of genuine peace, as the old New England kitchen. To enter it was to be wrapped about with content as with a garment. And such was Phœbe's since the all-essential element of household affection abode therein.

Phoebe set an additional plate for Tommy, and dished the stew, while Blossom still banged milk-pan and tongs, ignoring Tommy's advances and keeping her eyes strictly fixed upon the business in hand.

Then, suddenly dropping the tongs, she ran to him, laughing. But as he stooped to kiss her, she danced back again.

"Na, na!" she said, in her baby dialect.

"Ain't she a beauty?" said Tommy, admiringly, finding her, with true masculine taste, sweeter in perverseness than in surrender.

Between the two, Phœbe and Tommy, it was Aunt Chatty's opinion that Delight was in a fair way to be spoiled.

She was not one of those angelic children fated to die young. There was a good healthy body of sin in her that it would take years of discipline to eliminate before she would be fit for that final consummation—a willfulness to which Phœbe surrendered so entirely, Aunt Chatty felt called upon to remonstrate.

"Railly, now, Phœbe, you must make the little creatur' mind, or she'll have the upper hand o' you before you know it."



Delight had climbed upon a table, and was pulling at a framed sampler hanging on the wall.

"I 'ant it! I 'ant it!" was all she deigned to reply to Phœbe's faint remonstrance. "Go 'a'! go 'a'!" she cried out as she was lifted down. "Oo's a naughty old ting! oo's a naughty ole ting!"

It was evident that she was fast nearing the upper hand.

"You must make her mind when you set out, Phœbe. Now, I don't hold to nagging child'en day in and day out, saying 'You sha'n't do this and you sha'n't do that.' They're human beings; and it stands to reason they don't like it better'n grown folks would. And the poor little creatur's'll have enough to contend ag'inst in their own natural sins, without our manufacturing more for 'em: telling 'em this is naughty, and that is naughty, when it's only we that's tired and cross and it goes a'gin our nerves. Kenelm says give 'em their heads, but keep the reins, and let 'em know once in a while that you have got 'em. But don't keep jerking on 'em. 'That's the way I break colts,' says he, 'and child'en's nothing but colts. But you have to haul 'em in smart some times, and when you set out to do it, do it.' "

In accordance with which advice, Phœbe, on a scandalous outbreak of disobedience one day on Delight's part, led her upstairs to the garret, and, bolting the door, left her there until such time as she could be "good."

Ordinarily no place could have been more to the child's mind as a play place. A wide garret, extending over the whole house, with delightfully decrepit furniture that collapsed when you sat down upon it; garnished with ancient garments that hung from wooden pins in the rafters; with a huge brick chimney filling a goodly space in the center, its flues alive with twittering swallows; with eaves offering every inducement to the explorer; with a colony of mud-wasps in one window, and a large family of bright-eyed mice in its secret places—all this made up a realm of enchantment when voluntarily entered upon. But to be bolted in! Under such conditions, as everybody knows, a palace becomes a dungeon.

Mammy's unexpected rebellion had surprised Delight, and she stood for some moments and listened motionless to Phoebe's footsteps reluctantly descending the stair. She heard the door at the stair's foot close, and the bolt slip. She did not cry or sulk. Brimming with mischief, she had that happy disposition that accepts the inevitable, and makes the best of it. She walked over to the wasps' window to inspect their mud tenements. She looked out, and her countenance brightened. She tried the low window. It lifted easily. There was a button on the frame to hold it up; she turned the button, then she stepped upon the sill. Was the child going to jump out? Guardian angels defend her!

No; she was not going to jump out. She was go-

ing to step out upon the gently sloping roof of the woodhouse that came up to the sill, and walking along that, step into the sturdy branches of an apple tree and thence to the ground. She accomplished this feat with the agility and something of the mischievousness of a squirrel, chuckling to herself as she fancied Mammy's surprise when she should suddenly appear before her.

She crept round the corner of the house, toward the open kitchen door; but as she neared it she heard a singular noise. It was like somebody crying. She stopped, listened, and her mischievous face grew grave. She stole on, and peeped into the door; Mammy was rocking to and fro, with her apron thrown over her head, sobbing and ejaculating:

"Poor little Blossom! Poor little creatur'!"

The child's face quivered. Then she turned and stole swiftly back, up the apple tree and across the roof, and into the window, closing it gently. She sat down on a chest by the chimney and waited, with the biggest kind of a lump in her throat.

In a very short time Phoebe was heard to unbolt the door.

"Little Blossom," she called as she came up the stairs.

"Iss, Mammy," replied a voice so subdued, so changed from Delight's usual musical clamor, Phoebe quickened her step. Delight running to her clasped her about.

"I'll be dood! I'll be dood!" she said, and burst into a passion of tears.

Phœbe was overwhelmed with remorse. She clasped the sobbing little sinner in her arms and soothed her.

"I'll never do it again, never; not if Aunt Chatty calls me a fool."

And she never had occasion. Delight never forgot the spectacle of Mammy crying because of her naughtiness. The lesson sank deep, as that lesson does sink, not only into a child's mind, but into the childlike mind; the lesson taught us when we look upon the innocent bearing the burden of our iniquities; paying the wages of our sins, and doing it for sheer love of us. But it was some time before Phœbe could fully forgive Aunt Chatty for her share in the business.

## CHAPTER XII.

There was another who, as time went on, watched over Delight with a love and tenderness akin to that of Phœbe, and with a parental solicitude not surpassed by that of Aunt Chatty, and that other was Mr. Feilding.

Like her mother before her—and Mr. Feilding never had any doubt as to her mother; how could he, with that interview with the Major ever fresh in his mind?—like Nannie, she became his little pupil, his study her schoolroom. In a corner by the fireplace and against the wall was a settle, cushioned with faded green worsted, and screened from draughts by a high arm. Here Delight curled up to con her lessons, while Mr. Feilding wrote at his table, or sat tipped back in a quaint high rocking-chair, reading, with his feet on the iron fire-frame. Summer and winter these were his, as the settle was hers. In winter a wood fire burned on the hearth. At other times a huge jar of blue china stood within the fire-frame, the contents of which marked the procession of flowers, beginning with lilac and ending with crysanthemums.

On a stool by Mr. Feilding's side, which brought her head to a level with his shoulder, Delight stood to recite till such time as the stool

was no longer needed. In time another pupil was added—Tommy—who was to be fitted for Brown University, and was to be taught Latin and Greek and Euclid. What Tommy did, Delight did, so far as she could, from climbing the tallest trees to declining *musa*; and so she, too, studied Latin, like Nannie before her; but with a steadier brain, and no red and white skeletons danced in her healthy dreams.

Her little figure could sometimes be seen perched on the wood-pile, where Mr. Feilding was at work, or skipping by his side in an occasional walk over the fields. But always occasional, for Phoebe counted the minutes when Delight was away. It was the fact that, while the district school would take her from her side six hours of the twenty-four, and only three at most were needed for her lessons with Mr. Feilding, that had led her to accept eagerly his offer to teach her.

So Delight vibrated between the parsonage and the old gray house like a gay little pendulum, but, like the sun-dial, marking only sunshiny hours. She was seldom seen elsewhere, and consequently, although a sociable little soul, fond of her kind, made few acquaintances. And it was because of this seclusion that she was fully six years old before she chanced to see and be seen by Major Carpenter.

She had wandered far afield that day, having come upon a brood of partridges, the mother,



under pretence of a broken wing, leading her a long chase. Raven Brook, with its sunny shallows and baby rapids, was a favorite playground of her and Tommy. In it they sailed ships and built dams, and Delight had a story of how it "wun and wun" under the hill where lived the old woman who baked apples and sold cranberry pies, and by the palace of the king counting out his money, and the queen eating bread and honey, and the maid hanging out clothes in the "darden"; for Delight began to trim the purple sails of her fancy before she was mistress of correct English.

In short, this brook ran wimpling through the enchanted Land of Mother Goose, a portion of the realm of the Eternal Now, over which domain time has no power; which and whose inhabitants, like those on Keats' Greek Vase, "shall remain in the midst of other woe than ours.'" "When old age shall each generation waste"—a perpetual paradise for children of every age.

Tommy dearly loved the story of it all.

"I can't think how you know it," he would say. "Tell it again, Delight."

"An' we'll sail and sail, Tommy, an' bimeby we'll tum to de bear's house. An' de big bear'll say, 'Tum wite in, itty boy an' dirl, an' sit down in my chair; an' dere's my teenty-tonty itty wite bed for 'oo to seep in.' An' we say, 'Tank 'oo, dood bear, but we's doin' to see de keen dat eats bread an' honey.' An' den we sail an' sail, an'

bimeby we see de old woman o' Banbawy Cwoss awidin' on her sur-weet itty horse, wive bells on her pink toes. An' she say, 'Tum an' have a wide wive me, itty boy an' dirl.' An' we say, 'Tank 'oo, ole Banbawy Cwoss woman, we tant top. We's doin' to see de keen dat eats bread an' honey.' An' we sails and sails, an' we tums to a big gween field, an' dere's a cow a-feedin', an' she say, 'Tum, itty boy an' dirl, an' dump over de moon wive me.' An' dere was de tat a-fiddlin', an' de dish a-wunnin' away wive de spoon. An' dey say 'Tum an' have fun, itty boy an' dirl.' An' we say, 'Tank 'oo, Missy Cow an' Miss Tat, an' itty dish an' spoon, we tant top. We's doin' to see de keen dat eats bread an' honey.'

"An we sails an' sails, an bimeby we tum to Jacky's bean stalk; an' Jacky he hollers wite out, 'Tum tate up my 'talk, itty boy an' dirl, an' see de big, big, big giant.' An' we say, 'No, itty Jack Bean-talk, we tant top. We's doin' to see de keen dat eats bread an' honey.' An' Jacky, he say, 'Here's a dold apple for 'oo, itty boy and dirl.' An' it wolls wite down de 'talk, an' over de grass, an' tate into de boat. An' we sails an' sails, an' bimeby we tum to a shinin' house, all wite, an' a darden full o' boo-booful buttertups an' woses an' tingin' blackbwirds, an' sur-weet itty blue birds, an' de king a-settin' in de parlor winder, toutin' out his money. An' he say, 'Tum wite in, itty boy an' dirl, an' see my blackbwird pie. It ain't *tilled* blackbwird pie,' he say. 'Dey's alive, an'

dey tings.' An' 'No, tank 'oo, king,' we say. "We's tum to see de keen. An' will 'oo p'ease to tell us where de titchin is?' An' he say, 'Tum tate up de shinin' wite steps, an' do into dat itty blue door an' 'oo'll find her.'

"An' we do up the shinin' wite steps, an' knot at de itty blue door. An' de keen say, 'Tum wite tate in, itty boy an' dirl, an' eat tum bread an' honey.' An' we do in, an' de sur-weet itty titchen is all over blue an' boo-booful, an' shinin' milk-pans ite Mammy's. An' de keen have a shinin' cwon on her head."

"And when are we going?" asked Tommy, nothing doubting, so convincing is the graphic narrative.

"O, tum time."

Delight once went over the whole delightful tale to Phœbe, who listened, held by its charm, though doubtful of its morality. Phœbe had never read novels. They were stories, she had always understood, compounded of lies. And this sounded uncommonly like something of that kind.

"Did you dream it, little Blossom?" she asked.

"Deam it, Mammy! Why, no! I'se been dere!" Which added fib sent Phœbe to Aunt Chatty.

"Lor', Phœbe, don't you worry," said that wise woman. "Healthy children's always full o' sech fancies, more or less. And they ain't fibs any more than the parables in Scriptur' are. And

it's my opinion they're taught sech things for a purpose. I didn't use to be quite clear about their 'angels,' that do always behold the face o' their Father; jest what it meant. But I've no manner o' doubt now that it means them that watches over 'em, and teaches 'em jest them things."

And Phœbe accepted Aunt Chatty's interpretation, and like a mother of old, pondered these sayings in her heart.

Meanwhile the partridge mother has led Delight a long chase, permitting her now and then, in the cunning of her motherhood, almost to put her chubby hand upon her. Arriving at the border of Raven Brook, with one final flutter she disappeared. Delight saw her disappear, however, without a pang, for, as usual, a new interest at once presented itself.

She had struck the brook at a stop where it widened into a shallow, in which squirmed a myriad of pollywogs in every stage of evolution. Delight gave a shriek of pleasure as she saw them. Tommy had told her how they turned into frogs; and here was one dear little one with claws just budding, and there was a second almost full blown. She would catch them and carry them home to finish off in the rainwater hogshead. She and Tommy had more than once considered that plan.

To think of it was to do it. She gathered up the skirt of her long-sleeved tyre in one hand,

and proceeded to scoop the pollywogs and water into it with the other. Absorbed and dripping, she was aroused by an angry voice from across the brook.

"Brat!" it said "what are you doing here?"

The hand that held the tyre dropped, and the pollywogs fell back into their native element. For an instant Delight was discomfited. It was a red and angry face which confronted her. But she did not know what fear was. Besides, a charming supposition presented itself. On the border of Mother Goose Land, in a portion tenanted by "naughty folks," lived Taffy, the Welshman and Thief. She had struck the brook at a spot unknown to her; she was probably in the neighborhood of Taffy's home.

"Are you Taffy?" said she.

"Taffy!" said the man taken aback in his turn, "who's Taffy"?

Delight clasped her hands behind her, as she did when about to spell, and began:

"Taffy was a Welshman,  
Taffy was a tief,  
Taffy tum to my house  
An' tole a piece o' beef.  
I——"

Here she was interrupted, Major Carpenter, for it was he, having recovered from the surprise of being addressed as "Taffy." He shook a stout whip at her.

"Saucebox," said he, "don't you know that this field belongs to me?"

Why, of course she did, for was he not Taffy? And did not the story say, "I went to Taffy's house, and Taffy wa'n't at home"? He was walking out in his field, of course. Delight fairly beamed.

"And what made you teal, Misser Taffy? It's naughty to teal."

She spoke in her most winning manner, shaking her head solemnly.

There was something in her look as she stood there smiling with a cheerful, confiding courage, that told Major Carpenter who she was. Children in general did not come within the scope of his geniality; they were always warned off his premises. And as it flashed into his mind who this one was, he grew purple with anger, and his pale blue eyes expanded in their sockets.

"So it's you, is it?"—a word not to be set down—"Get away from here, and don't let me catch you here again."

The whip flew through the air and stung the small hands, but haply did not touch the bonnie face.

Delight clasped them and stepped back. Her eyes flashed. How like in expression they were to Nannie's! how like, too, the mouth! and there was a familiar ring in her voice, as she said:

"Naughty, naughty Taffy to 'trike a little dir! Go 'way! go 'way! I 'ate you, I do!"

He did not strike again. He stood a moment while Delight flashed defiance across the brook, and then gathering up her tyre again, began to scoop up pollywogs.

"——!" A volley of oaths, and he turned and walked off fairly worsted.

Delight found the farm in a paroxysm of dismay over her absence when she arrived with her pollywogs. Of these, she related the capture, and after they were consigned, not to the rain-water hogshead, but to a specially prepared cask, told, as a side adventure, of her encounter with Taffy. An angry ridge on either small hand marked the passage of the whip. Both Phœbe and Abram recognized in Taffy, Major Carpenter. Phœbe bathed the hands and could have wept over them, and Abram pronounced the Major a "brute and a coward."

For before this, Abram was back. Aunt Chatty, seeing the time ripe, had told him that she thought if he happened round, and didn't say much, but conducted himself discreetly, he might be reinstated in his old place.

"I'll dew it," says Abram, "for I ain't felt to hum sence I quit."

He happened round. The moment was opportune. A herd of cattle, headed by an Ayrshire bull, was just on the point of breaking through into Phœbe's meadow and her unenclosed garden. Abram drove them off, strengthened the fence with a stake or two, and then sauntered with a

casual air into the neighborhood of the barns. Here a heavy door was hanging by one hinge, a door Phœbe had vainly tried to lift back into place and secure. Abram fetched hammer and nails from the tool house, and the job was done, "in a jiffy." He ventured a little nearer the house. The saw was stuck in a tough log that lay on the saw-horse. He sawed and split it, and gathering up an armful started for the house. He entered circumspectly in his stocking feet, slipping off his shoes at the door, so as to bring in no dirt, as in the former time. He laid the wood in the wood-box in the orderly way he knew Phœbe liked. Then he turned to her where she was washing dishes.

"Don't y' think, Miss Tilson," said he, "it's about time the clover on that heat'er-piece was cut? Jest say the word, an' I'll hev it down by six o'clock p. m."

"Very well," replied Phœbe.

And Abram was reinstated.



## CHAPTER XIII.

"Uneventful," must be said of most days and years. Birth comes, marriage perhaps comes, death comes. These are epochs known of all. But the stream of every-day life, especially in quiet country towns, flows unbroken, its current even almost imperceptible. It may be gathering force for some great leap, or for the making of some narrow rock-bound passage, but silently, noiselessly. Only the few who are wakeful and watchful are aware of this secret accumulation of power.

So life ran in Byfield in the years succeeding the coming of little Blossom. Major Carpenter, shortly after his interview with Mr. Feilding, took up his pew carpet, and migrated with that and the foot-stools to the Universalist fold, shaking the orthodox dust from off his feet. His hymn books, not being in harmony with the doctrine of that fold, he left behind. Few regretted his departure, and the event, not unexpected, created but a ripple of excitement.

Major Carpenter's was a strong personality. Wherever he was his influence would be felt, and would be, if he so chose, and he generally did so choose, a dominating one. To his indomitable will he added the usual accompaniments of such

will—great patience. His hand once upon the plough he did not turn back. And the task he had set himself this time was the undermining of Mr. Feilding. He hated him—he hated him for his interference in Nannie's behalf; hated him for his knowledge of himself; hated him for his uprightness, and his intention was to plough deep. The thing could not be accomplished in a day, but he could work and wait. And first, let us debauch public opinion, he said.

Heretofore the ruling element in Byfield had been conservative, a word used in its original sense, untouched by even the suggestion of toryism. The same town officers were elected year after year. Affairs ran in a safe and familiar groove. Certain families were more especially looked up to—the minister's, the doctor's, the better-informed. Not that everybody was not as good as everybody else and acknowledged to be so. But there, as elsewhere, the natural leaders of thought and action came to the front, and having been found trustworthy were followed.

But a change was impending, the signs of which were at first more felt than acknowledged by such as were sensitive to the civil and moral atmosphere. There was a visible lessening of respect for established things. Ominous mutterings concerning the monopoly of the town offices by a chosen few began to be heard. These offices ceased to be regarded as responsibilities shouldered, and to be borne conscientiously in the pub-

lic interest, but began to be looked upon rather as prizes to be contended for. There was much loose talk about sharing the benefits accruing from them—feeding in turn at the public crib.

"Everybody ought to have his chance," it was said. There was Squire Palmer had been representative to the general court for a succession of years. Why not have a change, and give somebody else the money who needed it? Why should he, with the best farm in town, his saw-mill and bank stock, pocket an annual hundred into the bargain? He didn't need it!

"Why not go the whole hog while you're about it, and 'a' done with it?" suggested Jo Sears, who had small sympathy with these proposed revolutionary measures. "Send up Billy Brown, and relieve the town o' his support. A hundred a year'd keep Billy han'some and find him in snuff, and he'd enjoy a season in Boston. I took him in t'other day when I was drivin' over t' Sutton, and when we come to the meeting-house and store and Cap'n Allen's place, Billy looked about, and says he, 'Is this Boston?' He'd never seen such a collection o' buildings t'once."

Billy Brown was one of the two town's poor, and consumed his tobacco through the nose, instead of after the ordinary fashion of man.

"Wal, Jo, you're always turnin' everything into a laugh," peevishly remarked the speaker who had suggested a rotation in office. "But that

ain't answerin' my argument. I wasn't speakin' o' town paupers. Why shouldn't every man now that pays a tax have a chance at that hundred, and git his money back? Come now, jest tell me that!"

"Well, Sam, why didn't you let that peddler feller clean your clock t'other day? He was fast enough t' do it, and needed the twenty-five cents bad, I'll bet."

"Because nobody ain't agoin' to tinker my clock except them that knows how. But what's that to do with the gin'ral court?"

"Well, I don't know but the general court and affairs o' government are about as much consequence as that old clock o' yourn, and yit you'd set any fool of a taxpayer to tinkerin' 'em jest because he'd find the cash handy."

"Machinery's machinery," replied his opponent, oracularly, "and a man's got to know how it works before he can fix it up; but anybody can hold up their right hand an' vote."

"O, that's the view you take o' law makin', is it? Jest hold up your right hand and vote, and have somebody handy to tell y' when to hold it up and when not to, I s'pose? That reminds me of a story I heard t'other day about Deacon Lucas over t' Sutton. They've been havin' the highest kind of a school row over there, and every ole putt fur and near was hauled out t' town-meetin' t' vote on one side or t'other; and the deacon he was on his way to the polls when he met Ingalls.

Now, the deacon's a good man, as good as they make 'em; but he ain't got no more interleck than a claw-hammer, and Ingalls jest pulls out a vote and gives him. 'I s'pose it's all right,' says the deacon. 'Oh, yes, it's orthodox,' says Ingalls, and at that the deacon steps up and drops it in without another word. Jest let Ingalls tell him house-breakin' 's orthodox, and he'd believe it."

"You're jest like my old woman, Jo; undertake t' argy with you, and you're off on a tangent. The p'int is," emphasizing his statement by placing the forefinger of his right hand forcibly in the palm of his left, "the p'int is, we men have to pay a tax—and what for? We don't get no good out on't, fuz I see, and it all goes t' them that's got plenty. Now my tax is about five dollars a year. In twenty years that amounts to jest a hund'ed dollars," with immense pride in his arithmetic. "Now, why shouldn't I get that hund'ed dollars once in a while instead o' Squire Palmer gittin' it all the time?"

"Your argyment, Sam, don't hold water," retorted Jo. "Squire Palmer's tax is just about a hundred a year, and why shouldn't he get his back? The fact is you do get something; plenty. Y' get life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, old man, jest as the Declaration o' Independence says, and a darned sight more. Schoolin' for them thirteen young ones o' yours for one thing. The men that made up that Declaration knew a thing o' two as well as you, Sam. And instead o'

hankerin' after the general court, you and me and such folks had better be satisfied to vote about what we know about—roads and hog reeves and such—and leave things we don't know to them that do. I wonder who'll be hog reeve next year.. There don't seem to be much courtin' going on at present."

Newly-married men were always elected hog reeves for the ensuing year. And if the reader does not know what a hog reeve is he can be told in a sentence. His office was to pick up any stray hog or other animal and clap it into the pound till such time as the owner should pay the enforced fine.

But Jo's opponent was not to be bluffed, and in his eagerness said more than he intended, and let a large cat out of the bag.

"Wal, there's one thing sure. Things is goin' to be looked into, and there ain't a-goin' to be any more savin' out o' rich men's pockets. The poor man's a-goin' to have his turn. That Surplice Revenue money's a-goin' to be took up. It was given originally to the town, and the town's them that pay taxes, the citizens."

Sam had evidently been loaded and primed by someone. He was not wont to be so eloquent, and every eye in the store was turned questioningly upon him as he went on. It was the Saturday evening session of the town parliament.

"It 'ud orter b'en divided among 'em in the fust place. But instead o' that 'twas took and

invested in some bank or other that might a' bu'st or pretended t' bu'st. Them banks are risky things. And the int'rest on't they say has been took for schools. Mebbe 't has. But 't any rate, it's jest so much money saved out o' taxes of sech men as Palmer and Feildin'."

"T' say nothin' o' Major Carpenter," put in Jo, with a keen eye on the speaker.

"Major Carpenter wa'n't a citizen o' the town when that money was give. If he had 'a b'en 'twould 'a' divided round 't once. He ain't a man t' defraud the poor. And nobody reely knows what has b'en done with that int'rest money. Palmer and Feildin' are school committee, and have had the handlin' on't. But it's a-goin' t' be hauled up t' next town meetin'."

Jo gave a low whistle, but otherwise kept silence.

Stuttering Pete took up the refrain.

"Oh, so th-th-that's what you've been up to, is it? I m-m-mistrusted some dirty egg or other was bein' hatched up t' Jotham's shop. It's been t-t-too darned quiet there for any good. When pigs stop gruntin' and s-s-squeelin' you may know they're at the swill. I'm n-n-not surprised like some, though. I've had a hint on't."

"Yis, a hint on't, oosh!"

Simple Nate was present, and came in not so much as a chorus, as a refrain, whenever he saw an opening. And it was through him that Stuttering Pete had acquired his hint on't, like many

another that kept him abreast of town politics. And Simple Nate, as usual, had acquired his information at a "winder." Listening at "winders" was one form his simplicity took.

"How much d' y' calkerlate to get apiece, when you divide the Surplus Revenue?" asked Jo.

"Wal, it's one thousand dollars," replied Sam. "And there's about two hundred voters; and that means five dollars apiece."

And Sam smacked his lips. He didn't often handle five dollars in the lump.

"Y' can take my share, Sam, and that'll double it for you. For my part, I'd as lieve touch p'ison. It'll be money stole, in my opinion. 'Twa'n't give to individuals. 'Twas give to the town."

The speaker was a bluff, hearty farmer, whose physique contrasted broadly with that of the rest of the company, who were of the true Cape Cod type—lean, shrewd of aspect, nervous of manner.

"Don't go t' offering premiums for iniquity, Brad," remonstrated Jo. "It's like carting her-ring t' Taunton. The devil's got a supply."

But Sam's reply was to Brad.

"Other folks don't think it's stealin'. Folks that knows, too; folks that knows law."

And then stopped short. Like most leaky fellows, Sam usually clapped in the stopper too late, as in this instance.

"Ho!" cried Stuttering Pete, receiving instantaneous enlightenment on a remark of



Simple Nate's he had not been able to make out.

"So you've got so fur, have you? T-t-took legal advice, hay! But, sho!" with infinite contempt, "you ain't t' blame, y' poor tyke, you; there's th-th-them that knows better t' the bot-tom on't."

"If y' mean Major Carpenter," leaked Sam, "he's a true friend o' the uppressed poor."

"The uppressed poor, oosh!" said the refrain.

Jo tipped back on the hind legs of his chair, and fired in a string of small shot.

"Uppressed poor! and who are they, I sh'd like t' know? What uppressed poor is there in Byfield? Billy Brown lives on the fat of the land, and old Granny Tinker ain't seen her feet for years, stuffed with pork and cabbage, and waddling like a duck. And every married man's got his house; and them that ain't married don't deserve any. And what more d'y'expect in this world? And what's five dollars going to do for y'?"

"G-g-good Lord!" stammered Pete, "y' might as well save y'r ammunition, Jo! It's no use t' try t' pin sech critturs down t' p-p-perticlars. 'Tain't one thing they want, but a gin'ral bustin' up, and everybody g-g-goin' in fur what he can git, and the d-d-devil take the hindmost. Sam'd like to swap houses with Squire Palmer. Now, ain't th-th-that about it, Sam?"

As it was "about it," Sam hesitated to reply. Ignorant, discontented, lazy, envious, he went to

the make-up of that uneasy element that works as a ferment in all societies, and doubtless conduces to a healthy state of the body politic if properly restrained, by causing the better element to carefully assay its motives and deeds whether they be of pure metal or no.

"If there's going to be a general swop," remarked Jo, "I shall go in for the Major's house and premises. They're about the best in town, and consider'ble bigger'n mine. And as to his bank and fact'ry stock, I'll divide with him. I ain't grasping. Jest give me enough so I sha'n't have to work, that's all I ask. How'll that do, Sam? The Major'd orter be willing to eat his share of his own stew. He's making, as my old dad'd say, 'a whip fur his own backsides.'"

"Tain't the five dollars, it's the principle," said Sam, grandiloquently.

Thereat there was a burst of laughter, in which the stout farmer lost his breath and was pounded on the back by his nearest neighbor. After the whooping and spluttering had subsided, a man hitherto silent opened his mouth and spake. Cy Lyon, from that portion of Byfield known as Sodom, a district as sulphurous as its name, though whether that name was bestowed from a fancied resemblance of its population to the Biblical Sodom, or whether the inhabitants had deteriorated by trying to live up to that name, it is difficult to say.

"Principle!" said Cy, "that's eggzactly what

the Major's be'n a-talkin' all over Sodom. 'Tain't so much the five dollars, he says, though that's something in a poor man's pus. But it's teachin' them darned high-flyin' fellers like Feildin' and Palmer a lesson. He says Feildin's a Fed'ralist, and would fetch back kings if he could, and them times when common folks was trod underfoot. And Sodom folks are jest fools enough to swaller that rot. Feildin' wrote a paper when he was in collidge praisin' up Fed'ralism and runnin' down Dimocracy, only he's lyin' low jest now till the right time comes. The Major's seen that paper. It's printed. Sodom's all up in arms about it. Sodom's mostly like a coal-pit jest on the p'int o' blazin'. Jest give her a scratch, and she's all afire. I'd git out of it if I could, but my property's all there. Ole Dan Vickery's ravin'. They're all comin' t' town meetin' t' vote. Ole Vickery can't hardly stand on his laigs, he's so fur gone with liquor and other p'ison, but he's comin'. Goin' to be fetched. Lord! did y' hear about that trick he played on his poor ole wife t'other day?"

No one had heard.

"Wal, the poor old crittur' wanted a new gown bad; hadn't a decent one to her back. And she never has a cent o' money t' buy nothin' with; has to ask fur every darned copper. And she'd about as lieves jump inter the hoss pond as dew it. And 'tis 'bout as resky. He don't mind knockin' on her down more'n I do hittin' a

hossfly. Wal, one day after he'd b'en havin' one o' his awful spells o' devil's-tremens, and she'd b'en a-nussin on him as though he was the most valuable husband in the world, instead o' one a woman wouldn't object t' the Lord's takin' any time He see fit, and the quicker the better, he did seem kind o' different, and she thought she'd ventur' t' mention the gown. And he was appayrently as soft and yieldin'—hog-fat at ninety-nine in the shade couldn't a' b'en softer. And she, poor crittur'! was tickled a'most to death. And he said she might fix right up and go over to Joppy"—another Biblical district, but of happier augury—"and he'd write a billet to the storekeeper. He knowed him, and would let her have what she wanted and charge it. And he seemed so pleased, and kep' smilin' and smilin', the poor crittur' reely begun t' think he must 'a' met with a change, b'en convarted right slap out o' hand. Jest as though God A'mighty Himself could make the devil let go his grip o' ole Dan Vickery. But women's confidin' critturs——"

"T-t-true as gospil," interrupted Pete.

"What d' you know about them, an ole bach like you? Howsomdever, she fixed up and went, and my wife lent her a shawl t' cover up her rags. It's a good four mile t' Joppy, and the poor crittur' was about tuckered out when she got there. But she handed the billet over to the storekeeper, and while he was a-readin' on't, she jest cast her eyes over the carlikers to pick out

one she liked. And she fixed on a dark blue, speckled with white stars. She thought 'twould wash, for she's a considerate, savin' crittur. Ole Vickery'd b'en on the town long ago if she hadn't a b'en. Wal, she'd picked it out and was thinkin' how she'd have it made with th' sleeves my wife'd told her was the latest fashion. 'Now, you'd think, Jerushy,' says I to my wife, 'that ole Mis' Vickery, after all she's gone through with, starved, and beat, and Lord knows what, 'ud care mighty little what the fashions was,' but fashions dies hard in womenkind——"

"W-w-weak creaturs!" ejaculated Pete.

"Good Lord! If they'd 'a' had the trainin' o' you, you wouldn't be continually interruptin'. Wal, she'd picked it out and decided on the fashion she'd have it made, when she see the storekeeper lookin' darned queer, fust at the billet and then at her, and says he. 'My good woman, do you know what's writ in this billet?' 'No, sir,' says she. 'I can't read writin',' which is true; and then he up and told her what that infernal cuss had writ. 'Don't you trust my wife fur a darned thing, for I won't pay for't,' and signed that with his own name, 'Dan Vickery'; and if ever a man's handwritin' 'd order be his passport t' hell, that 'd order be hisen, a-sendin' that poor ole wife, clean tuckered out a-nussin' o' him a four-mile walk just t' make game on. If he don't go t' hell, I don't see any use o' havin' any hell, and the meetin' houses might as well

shet up. But the storekeeper was game. 'Mis' Vickery,' says he, 'you sh'll have the dress, and if ever you have the money to pay for't, well an' good, an' if y' don't y' needn't worry.' But 'tain't,' says she to my wife, 'tain't as though Dan give it t' me.' Women are about the most unaccountable bein's the Lord ever made. "I dew reely believe, Jerushy," says I, 'that Mis' Vickery has a likin' yit fur that measly, dirty, blackguard and rapsallion of a man.' 'An' don't swear, Cy,' says Jerushy."

"He, he, he!" snickered Sam Carson.

"Oh, you think it's funny, do y'?" said Cy, turning upon him. "You jest stop that, or I'll give y' something 'll make y' laugh out o' t'other corner o' your mouth."

In vain, when at last Major Carpenter's tactics became known, did those who favored keeping the Surplus Revenue intact, endeavor to stay the rising tide. Into the controversy he had managed to skilfully introduce the religious antagonism, than which there is no better mainspring for keeping a quarrel going; and at last it came to be understood that the battle lay largely between the adherents of orthodoxy and those of universalism, and Sodom claimed to be Universalist—i. e., when its populace did go to meeting, it was to the rather intermittent services of the broader denomination. Its supporters as a whole were a feeble folk, and Sodom's devotion to its faith was

not of that kind which leads a man to put his hands into his pockets, however ill-furnished, for its dissemination, so when the funds ran low the meeting-house was shut up.

But it is not for us to criticise the faith or no-faith—for it was simply a negation—of Sodom, and such as it. The condemnatory old doctrines were doubtless largely responsible for its laxity of faith and of life. Keep telling a man he is a child of the devil, and in time he is likely to make good that statement. Feed the fathers on sour grapes, and the children's teeth will inevitably be set on edge.

Oh, loving Jesus Christ! how many of Thy Father's children have been driven into the wilderness in Thy most holy name!

Major Carpenter proved a skilful marshaller of forces. Another element, hitherto sheltered under the skirts of orthodoxy as on the whole the safest and best-paying for this world as well as the next, saw its chance of bettering itself, or thought it did; an element represented by Sam Carson. And Mr. Feilding had the pain of seeing this weaker element fall away. A sermon he preached upon the text, "*Hatred, and Hating One Another*," only served to fan the flame of bitterness. In the middle of it, Sam Carson finding it, as he thought, personal, went out, beckoning to his wife to follow, and she, although a staunch "professor," meekly obeyed, in her confusion stumbling against the pew door and slamming it.

"I ain't a-goin' to set still and hear any man tell me I'm damned to everlastin'," said Sam.

Mr. Feilding had said that "condign punishment" would be meted out to the hater of his brother, which statement Sam thus interpreted and applied. His wife ventured to say that she thought condign punishment didn't mean everlasting punishment. She endeavored to fortify herself by consulting a dictionary. But when she found that condign meant "well-merited," she concluded not to tell Sam. A man may reason himself out of everlasting punishment and say he don't believe in it, but who shall object consistently to well-merited punishment? Sam might find that interpretation more personal than his own. So it was rumored abroad that Mr. Feilding was pronouncing *Anathema Maranatha* from the pulpit on those who favored the division of the Surplus Revenue.

Town meeting came, and every voter was on hand to do his duty with the exception of Amasa Bryant, who was bedridden, and Sylvanus Briggs, who was laid up with a scalded foot. It was currently reported that the scalded foot was the result of an accident done on purpose by Desire, his wife, who was opposed to the division of the Surplus Revenue, of which measure Sylvanus—or Venus, as he was called for short—was an ardent supporter, and who, finding both entreaties and commands futile, had called in the boiling tea-kettle as an ally. It was further reported that



Sylvanus would have come despite the scalded foot had not Desire, suspecting his intention, locked up all his trousers. At any rate, as the neighborhood carry-all drew up at his door, Sylvanus put his head out of his bedroom window and remarked that circumstances over which he had no control prevented his attendance at town meeting; at the same time, winking significantly toward the kitchen door, whence a great clatter of pots, kettles and pans, issuing, indicated that Desire was pursuing her household duties with her usual uncompromising vigor.

Old Uncle Abel represented that class of voters now extinct, and beyond the resuscitation of the most enterprising reporter, who had voted for every president, from "Gin'ral Washington" onward, and which fact, in his opinion, gave additional value to his vote. As he was nearly helpless with rheumatism, and weighed hard upon two hundred and fifty pounds, it was with a good deal of difficulty that he was hoisted semi-annually into a wagon. But some kindly Samaritan was always found to perform that office, not so much for his own pleasure as Uncle Abel's, as one vote more or less was generally of little consequence.

But this year every vote counted, and he was eagerly sought by both parties, and the owners of a dozen vehicles of various kinds craved the honor of conveying him to the polls. His arrival was greeted with cheers from the

groups upon the porches and dotting the Green, and he was immediately seized upon by scouts from both sides. For Uncle Abel never committed himself prematurely to any measure, but judiciously sat upon the fence till sure which side offered the most succulent morsel. There was small doubt in this case; five dollars did not grow on every bush, and he jumped unhesitatingly.

Major Carpenter was elected chairman by an overwhelming majority over Squire Palmer, who had presided at town meetings from time immemorial. Sodom and its allies cheered. Never was town business dispatched with the celerity of that day. Appropriation after appropriation was voted with the ease and nonchalance of men owning not a dollar's worth of taxable property. No dissenting voice was listened to by the chair. The vote to divide the Surplus Revenue was carried amid vociferous cheers and whoops against which the chair made no protest. In fact, it was seen to grin approvingly from its position, islanded by pools of tobacco spittle. A fine odor of the same pungent fluid permeated the old meeting-house where the town meetings were held.

Old Dan Vickery was there, "chock-full o' skunk and iniquity." The Vickerys were a sort of gipsy folk, feeding largely through what would be called "poaching" in a game-preserving country, and everything was provender that came to their traps, including skunk. And it is said

that once you are rid of the association, skunk is very palatable, possessing the delicacy of chicken! However that may be, "chock-full o' skunk and iniquity" was borrowed by Jo Sears from Sam Carson, who arose once upon a time in a neighborhood prayer-meeting, when drunk and blubbering and seeking grace, and confessed he was "full o' pork and iniquity," a remark of Sam's not suffered to fall into oblivion.

The Sodom contingent had arrived in ramshackle hay-wagons with festive adornments of flags and streamers, and with the revolutionary mottoes, "Justice to the Poor Man," and "Down with Tyrants," affixed to the stakes, and accompanied by a brass band recently formed in the district, which discoursed music more vociferous than harmonious. And in the evening they burned Mr. Feilding in effigy in a field of Major Carpenter's in full view of the parsonage windows. In which wild orgy the band assisted until, fairly drunk, they turned their brass instruments into shillelahs, and went in for a free fight. Poor Mrs. Vickery, trembling at home, and foreseeing her spouse's ultimate condition, secreted herself temporarily in a hay mow.

As to the more decent among the victors, they celebrated their triumph in private with a sneaking sense of having been engaged in a bad thing in bad company, which momentary irritation, however, was allayed by the anticipatory balm of the coming five dollars.

"I knew in a minute how things had gone when I saw Henry coming home, stepping straight up and down as if he's walking on air," said Mrs. Palmer.

" 'I've worked for 'em,' says he, 'all my life, and given my services for nothing, and this is the thanks I get. Now they may take care o' themselves and waste every confounded cent o' the town money if they want to. I sha'n't interfere.' "

"And 'Lor! Henry,' says I, 'don't be ha'sh. You know you'll get over it, and go right on doing for 'em just the same.' If I do say it, there ain't a better man living than Henry Palmer. He'll spend and be spent for other folks.' "

"And it's a curious thing that the folks you do most for are the very ones to turn against you," rejoined Mrs. Feilding. They were watching the flames from the parsonage windows. "There's Sam Carson. I don't know what Alan hasn't done for him and his family. Sat up night after night with 'em when they were all down with typhus. And he even undertook to train that idiot boy, and has got him so his habits are decent, and he can work a little; and he's always finding jobs for Sam, to help him along in dull times, and having him to dinner. And having Sam to dinner is equal to an Egyptian plague of locusts. He cleans out the butt'ry. I always have to bake the day after. And now, just hear that!"

The flames flared high, consuming the straw with which the effigy was stuffed, and shouts were heard of "Feilding! Feilding!"

"Really, Alan, I don't see how you can stand there and look on so calmly. It is too abominable."

"It harms no one but themselves, poor fellows!" replied Mr. Feilding, from his station at another window. "And I was just thinking how many men—and women, too, for that matter—have really burned for doing their kind good service. And to care seriously for this would be absurd. It amuses them, and don't hurt me, as the great hulk of a fellow said when people wondered that he let his wife beat him."

"I really do believe, Alan, you'd invite 'em in now, and give 'em a good supper, if you thought they'd come," said Mrs. Feilding, despairingly.

There was one who leaned a head on Alan's shoulder, as she stood beside him with her two slender hands clasped about his arm; and she smiled up into his face and asked in a half-whisper: "Would you, daddy?" It was Delight, now a bonnie lass of fifteen.

"Why not, little Blossom?" he said, smiling down upon her in turn. "If your enemy hunger, feed him. But really, that is making a too serious business of it."

## CHAPTER XIV.

Neither Squire Palmer nor Mr. Feilding, whatever the latter's kindliness, was ready to give way to any measure he considered unjust, and at their instigation an injunction was laid upon that act of the town meeting that voted the division of the Surplus Revenue.

This angered their opponents beyond the bounds of discretion, and fearing lest after all they might be balked, they resorted to threats, threats somewhat vague in their nature, but which were emphasized by certain overt acts.

Mr. Feilding's orchard was entered, and his young trees barked. Howlings and caterwaulings resounded about the parsonage at night, and Mrs. Feilding, peeping out from behind her curtains, saw furtive figures gliding about. Threatening placards were nailed upon the posts of his front gate. One of these ran thus:

"Lynch that meddling parson, Feilding,  
Hang him on the nearest tree;  
And, if that is not convenient,  
Drown him in Monponsett Sea."


—"sea" being makeshift for "pond," which could not be worked in rhythmically. Mr. Feilding recognized in this effusion the rhyming hand of a young man he had taught gratuitously.

One night a large stone was thrown through the study window, narrowly missing Mr. Feilding's head. His friends began to fear for his personal safety, but Mr. Feilding remained tranquil. The mob element rife, such incidents were to be expected. It was a phase that would soon pass, he said.

But it did not pass. And one night, after Mr. Feilding returned from a prayer meeting in the east district, as he took his horse from the chaise and the shafts dropped, simultaneously both wheels came off. Upon examination it was found that the linch-pins had been withdrawn, and as this could not have been done when the chaise was in motion, it must have taken place when the horse was hitched to the staple in the school-house where the prayer meeting was held. The intention was obvious—to throw Mr. Feilding. To kill him? Well, it looked like it, certainly, or to hopelessly maim him. One chance out of a hundred that a man wasn't killed, with the linch-pins out of his chaise and his horse on a trot.

A committee of safety was promptly but secretly organized, who announced their intention of watching nightly in pairs at the parsonage. Mr. Feilding objected, and stout little Mrs. Feilding declared she was not afraid. In fact, one evening, hearing stealthy footsteps under her sitting-room window, she sallied out and came upon a figure wearing a grotesque mask, and him she thus addressed:

.



"You cowardly, sneaking brute, throwing stones into people's windows, and barking trees, and killing innocent chickens, I don't wonder you're ashamed of yourself and cover up your face. I don't know who you are, and I don't want to know, but——"

Here the parsonage monkey, a gift to Mr. Feilding from a parishioner who cruised as skipper to South American ports, swung down from one of the great willows in the front yard and snatched off the mask, and lo! there stood revealed Sam Carson's idiot son. The monkey chuckled and the idiot chuckled, and Mrs. Feilding took him in and gave him the delight of his palate in a generous square of gingerbread, such as she kept on cut for the children, and then sent him home.

"Jest like them cowards," said Sally Pike, "usin' that poor fool fur a cat's paw. An' there's no knowing, Pete, what the raskils 'll do next. Y' can't ever calkilate on what cowards'll do. They work underhand. An' Jo Sears' wife is sick, an' he can't watch to-night. An' you ain't no match alone f'r them great hulkin' Vickerys. You stutter so they'd have y' by the scruff o' your neck before you could git out a holler. An' you're sech a little man, Pete, one of 'em could a'most chuck y' inter his pockets. Prissy Cummins use' t' tailor for 'em, an' she said there's more stitchin' in one pair o' their trousers than in two or three common men's. I'll tell you what



I'll do, Pete. I'll go up t'-night an' tell Mis' Feilding I've come to stay whether she wants me or not. 'N' I can watch inside, an' if anything happens I'll come to the rescue.

"And I'll take father's gun. Mr. Feilding's got one, but, Heavens to Betsy! he's too good and pious to shoot a crow even if he caught it in the very act o' stealin' corn. An' I shouldn't dare to fire his off, if there was any occasion. Likelier'n not it would bu'st. Lor'! shouldn't I like t' get a shot at some o' them Vickerys' laigs! I'd give the doctor a job, jest as I did when that scapegrace, Dick Watson, tried to steal my peaches. I fired low and he yelled and run, and next mornin' the doctor was called in private to pick out the small shot, and promised never to tell on't. But Heavens to Betsy! ketch Dr. Crapoe keeping a secret. I mistrusted how 'twas, an' put the question right to him. 'You've be'n called in t' Dick Watson's laigs, I guess, doctor,' says I, an' he couldn't deny it.

"But the best thing was when I put tartar emetic inter my watermelons. I mistrusted they were goin' to be stole, an' that time I conspired with the doctor. 'Dose 'em well, Sally, whoever they be,' says he, when he gave me the tartar emetic, 'an' I'll give 'em a good scare when I'm called in.' An' that night every watermelon was took, an' at dawn the doctor was called int' the Brewsters', an' every soul of the whole p'ison lot was retchin', an' heavin', an' pukin'.

" 'Cholery!' says the doctor, an' scairt 'em so, he had t' take it back an' say t' must be melons. 'Probably you've b'en eatin' melons, an' melons sometime works like p'ison, specially if they ain't ripe. An' it's always safest t' confine yourself to your own melon patch. You know their ages,' says he. But the doctor says he never see folks sicker than they was fur about a couple of hours. He wa'n't in no hurry to cure 'em, and give 'em a light dose o' physic. ' 'Twould do 'em good to puke a spell,' he said. 'Learn 'em better than t' steal a lone woman's melons. Let 'em take one o' their own sect,' says he. 'But Heavens to Betsy! doctor,' says I, 'I guess I can take care o' myself as well as a man can.' 'An' I guess you can, Sally,' says he, laughing. Lor', wouldn't I like to dose the whole posse o' them Surplice Revenue pirates with tartar emetic!"

Sally fairly beamed as she fought her battles over, into which narrative Pete had in vain endeavored to break. He did not think the allusion to his stuttering and small stature kind of Sally, but he was in a forgiving mood just then. He admired her courage in firing a gun, for Pete was afraid of a gun. And he quite forgot to dwell, even in thought, upon the inherent weakness of the female sex.

He had always secretly admired Sally's grit, who, with the savings of her needle and goose in the tailoring line, had put by sufficient to build a neat little house, and stock an equally neat little

hencoop and garden. Still, she was only a woman, and it was not for a woman to hold herself superior to any man and to talk of guns. And he stretched himself to his utmost height, which brought the top of his head to an exact level with Sally's shoulder.

"I-i-if occasion offers," said he, "I shall borrow your gun, Sally. I'll n-n-not take one o' my own. Folks seein' me with a gun might suspect somethin' was t-t-taking place. An' we don't want 'em to know we're w-w-watchin'. But do you th-th-think it's safe to leave your own premises u-u-undefended, Sally?"

"I shall onchain Bose," says Sally, "an' I'll venture my place with him as guardeen."

Bose opening his eyes that instant, and catching sight of Pete, rushed the length of his chain with a yell that fully warranted Sally's confidence.

"You may depend on me, Pete," Sally went on. "I only wish the ole Major'd turn up. I don't know but I'd rather have a shot at his laigs than the Vickerys'. He's took to swillin' unaccountable lately, Tyly says. Heavens to Betsy! how deaf that crittur' is a-gettin'! I 'most split my gullet the last time I went to see her. But I like to be neighborly with folks. The Major heerd me yellin', I s'pose, an' started for the kitchen. I didn't hear him comin', but Tyly did. If a powder fact'ry bu'st in the kitchen she couldn't hear it, but she always knows by the jar when the Major's comin', an' jest how he's feelin'.

An' the jar must 'a' been heavy, for Tyly jumped up scairt enough an' calls out, 'Go, Sally! run! run! he's comin', an' he's awful, an' the bootjack's handy by the door!' My fust thought was I'd stay an' see what he would do. But he came rumblin' along the entry jest like a mad bull, an' I quit. I heerd him roarin' an' pawin' after I got out. I wonder Tyly's alive. She wouldn't be if she wa'n't tougher 'n tripe. But I should like a shot at them laigs o' the Major's! They're regular cider casks!"

So fully did Pete sympathize with this desire of Sally's they parted most amicably. Pete had been standing at Sally's gate during this colloquy, and as he turned away took in with a last comprehensive glance all the cheer and comfort of the small white, green-blinded house and its snug garden, composed in equal parts of vegetables, fruits and flowers. What a comfortable haven for old age! Alas! it would be long ere the savings from the shoe-bench could create such an one; and Pete sighed heavily.

"Well, Sally, I suppose I shall have to let you do as you're a mind to. Most folks do. But it's all nonsense, and I shall insist upon your going to bed," said Mrs. Feilding. "I shouldn't sleep a wink if I thought you were sitting up. 'Twould be just as though somebody were dying or dead in the house."

For it was Sally, with her strong nerves and by no means unsympathizing heart, who was

always summoned at such sad epochs in family life.

"Jest as you say," replied Sally, with no more scruple at the deception she proposed to practice than at the surreptitious administration to a refractory patient of a nauseous medicine under the guise of quince preserve.

Left to herself, at nine o'clock, Sally cleared her decks for action. She laid aside cap and foretop, and tied a red bandanna kerchief tightly over her cropped gray hair. The bows of her spectacles she tied together at the back of her head, lest in the *mêlée* she anticipated they might fall off. Her shoulder shawl was further secured with a row of stout pins. And the skirt of her gown was folded back and pinned behind just below the waist, bringing to view a homespun striped woolen petticoat of red and blue and a pair of substantial feet and ankles.

She then took from her bag, and set upon the table, a mince-pie—plummy; a raised cake—also plummy; doughnuts and a wedge of cheese. These she surveyed approvingly.

"I'll take 'em out to him about one o'clock. He'll be glad of 'em. It's a dretful damp night. I hope he's got on flannels."

"He," of course, was Stuttering Pete, her fellow watcher, to whom her heart had warmed perceptibly within the last twelve hours. There is nothing like a common interest or danger to draw out these affinities.

Then she stepped downstairs and out, but furtively, lest she should be heard, and brought in her gun, the presence of which she had not thought fit to impart to Mrs. Feilding.

As to Mr. Feilding, he knew nothing of the presence of Sally or her gun, and betook himself to bed with his usual reliance upon a watchful providence.

He was awakened by a concussion. His bed seemed to shake. He got up hastily and opened his door. In the pale light of the lessening moon he saw a grotesque figure dash past and out of the end door. He partially dressed and followed, his movements hastened by the sound of cries and scuffles, and by a stong smell of gunpowder which seemed to pervade the house.

In the orchard, to the east, he came upon a struggling group. It was Pete wrestling with the brawniest of the Vickerys, while Sally skipped—if so light a term may be applied to her camel-like gambols—about the two, dealing well-aimed blows at the Vickery, when she could do so without hitting Pete. Pete had his opponent by the legs, which he clasped so tightly that in vain did the latter struggle to free himself, showering blows thick and heavy on Pete's head and shoulders. Sally's gun was in her hand. She had reloaded, having fired the first shot at random from her bedroom window when the fray opened.

"Let him go, Pete!" she cried. "Let him go, an' I'll pepper his laigs for him, the pesky var-

mint! He'll kill y', Pete, if you don't. He'll knock the breath clean out o' your skin."

But Pete was true grit, and held on valiantly. The blows blinded him, and things grew dark.

"C-c-call the parson, Sally, q-q-quick!" he stammered out just as Mr. Feilding came up, followed by Mrs. Feilding, also in undress.

"Let him go, Pete," said Mr. Feilding, instantly taking in the situation.

"D-d-d' y' mean it, parson?" stammered Pete.

"Yes, let him go," and Pete released the Vickery, who staggered back and began to rub a leg.

"Damn the woman! She's hit me," he said; hearing which Sally chuckled for joy.

"Put up that gun, Sally," commanded Mr. Feilding, sternly, "and be thankful you haven't killed a man."

Sally chuckled still more vehemently, but obeyed the command by leaning the gun against the house. "It's Hezekiah, isn't it?" asked Mr. Feilding.

The Vickerys all had Biblical names.

"You'd better come in and let me see where you're hurt, and you, too, Pete. And Sally, will you be so kind as to rake out the kitchen fire. Ah, mother, I hope you were not alarmed!"

"Just a little at first, my son, finding robbers were about the premises," looking severely at Hezekiah.

"Th-th-there were two more o' the raskills,"

said Pete, "but they've cleared out. Shall I g-g-go fur the constable, Mr. Feilding?"

"No. If Hezekiah don't care to come in he can go. He probably won't trouble us again."

"I'm glad I peppered his laigs! I'm glad I peppered his laigs!" murmured Sally in Mrs. Feilding's ear, and that lady did not reprove her.

The Vickery walked off, muttering curses upon the comrades who had forsaken him at the sound of Sally's gun, and the four turned to go into the house. Pete staggered, and Sally caught him in her arms.

"Poor creatur'! Hezekiah Vickery's got a fist big enough to fell an ox."

And as Pete was examined in the light of the hastily-kindled fire, it was seen that his wounds were many, as well as honorable. One eye was closed, and of a royal purple, and his thin hair was matted with blood.

"I'm glad I peppered his laigs," reiterated Sally. "I a'most wish I'd done wuss."

And she proceeded, with Mrs. Feilding, to bathe and bandage her hero.

Made comfortable as he could be, Mrs. Feilding was then for putting him to bed. But "no," Pete said. If she would permit him, he should feel comfortabler and more at his ease to pass the remainder of the night by the kitchen fire, than in her best bedroom. Whereupon Sally declared her intention of also sitting up to keep him company and look after him.



No entreaties could change the determination of either, and an ample stuffed chair of the kind set aside in New England households for the convalescent was put in each corner of the fireplace. And Mr. and Mrs. Feilding going off to bed, quiet once more enfolded the parsonage.

Injunction had been laid upon Sally by Mrs. Feilding to help herself liberally from the but-tery. But she remembered her provender spread out above, and brought it down.

"There!" said she, cutting out a quarter section of the plummy mince pie, which operation Pete followed hungrily with his unbandaged eye. "Eat that. It'll do y' good. There's nothin' like good victuals fur buildin' folks up. An' you wa'n't ever very rugged, Pete."

And they ate comfortably together with a snug sense of comradeship.

The fire blazed cheerily.

"L-l-life has its compensations, Sally," remarked Pete, accepting a thick slice of raised cake.

"I've found it so," remarked Sally, sentimentously.

"If 't hadn't 'a' b'en for the f-f-fight an' my wounds, we shouldn't be settin' here so comf't-able, Sally. It's very c-c-comf'table," said Pete, wistfully.

"I wish I'd 'a' brought my knittin' work along," remarked Sally. "It 'ud be comf'tabler. Settin' still an' doin' nothin' always gives me the fidgets."

"D'y' feel fidgetty now, Sally?"

"Yes, I do. But, Heavens to Betsy! what am I a thinkin' on, Pete? There's that coat of yourn; I might as well be a-mendin' that. That pesky Vickery split it e'en a'most down the back. I'll jest git 'Mis' Feildin's work basket. She's got a side thimble, come to think on't."

And Sally fetched the basket, drew up a light stand to the fire, snuffed the candle, and fell to work. Pete followed her quick decided movements with—literally—an appreciative eye.

"You're a f-f-facultid creatur, Sally," said he. "That accounts fur you're being so forehanded."

"Yes, I'm pretty well off," replied Sally. "I've plenty for myself an' more."

Pregnant words!

Pete's heart began to swell with a purpose. Never before had the possible delights of a fire-side of his own presented themselves so keenly to his imagination. The warm glow of the fire, the softly cushioned chair, Sally in the opposite corner mending his coat—why could not this seeming accidental combination become a permanency? His pains were soothed as he dwelt upon the idea. He saw in sweet perspective the white, green-blinded house. It was small, but so much the snugger. And Pete reflected for the first time with satisfaction that he was not a large man. A man the size of Hezekiah Vickery or Dr. Crapoe would be out of the question in Sally's small house.

To be sure, Sally was not the meek, submis-

sive creature that had been hitherto his ideal of womankind. But if she had been other than Sally she would never have created that small edition of Eden.

He had his doubts whether he should ever be able to enforce that paragraph of the Marriage Service wherein the wife promises to "obey." He fancied he heard the laugh at his expense from those who had often heard him discourse on the inherent weakness of woman. But those might laugh who won. And Sally was a kind creature, despite her sharp tongue. Mrs. Feilding's hands, as they together bound up his wounded head, were no gentler or skilfuller than Sally's. And Pete had been also dimly aware at the time that it was Sally's strong arm that had guided him into the parsonage.

Certain sharp twinges of rheumatism, and of that dread disease called "new reality," had warned him of late that his hour of the "lean and slippered pataloon" was drawing nigh. And who was to care for him then? The querulous mother of the simple Nate? He thought of his bare bedroom over her north porch with an inward chill. And as he looked at her, Sally grew, not beautiful but attractive, which is a more intimate quality and more enduring.

She stitched away diligently, spectacles on nose and still fastened behind the red bandanna kerchief with a bit of twine. It had not occurred to her to retire to her bedchamber to "fix up" for her

night's vigil with Pete. Sally had a proper but not excessive regard for her personal appearance.

"S-s-s-s-s-s-Sally!" stammered Pete, and stopped.

Sally looked up. She read determination in his unbandaged eye.

"Heavens to Betsy!" she ejaculated, "you ain't a-goin' to——"

"Yes, I be, Sally," said Pete, his agitation putting to flight for the moment his stuttering demon. "I'm a-goin' to ask you to marry me an' take care o' me, Sally. Leastways, let me take care o' you. I can split the kindlins', an' fetch in wood an' water, an' there's a little corner o' the wood house where I could set up my bench, an' we'll be so comf'table. I'd earn my keep. An' you'd have somebody to look arter you, Sally, that belonged to you. Think o' that, now. There's nothin' makes a man or woman lonesomer on this airth than t' think there ain't a soul that belongs to 'm. Say 'Yes,' Sally; an' we'll be spliced as quick as the parson can do it legally. Say 'No,' Sally, an' I'll git right up, an' go home. Home! good Lord, I ain't got no home!"

Sally had dropped her sewing, and hands with it, into her lap, and listened calmly.

"Y' needn't go away, Pete," she now said.

"An' you'll have me, Sally?"

"Have y'! Heavens to Betsy! I made up my mind t' have y' when we was standin' at the gate to-day, or yesterday 'tis now. I see your purpus

in your eye then, or I shouldn't 'a' come and staid by y', an' let y' gone on with all that rigmarole. Yes, Pete, I guess we can be pootty comf't'ble together, an' y' needn't shoemake only when y' feel like it. I'll tailor your clo'es, an' you can make my shoes. An' y' shall have a home, Pete."

She went on, her voice softening and her real womanhood beaming through her horn-bowed spectacles, as she looked at him—wounded, bandaged, and leaning eagerly forward for her reply.

"Don't y' worry any more, but jest lean back an' take a good nap while I finish mendin'. You must be clean tuckered out."

And Pete, returning her look with an answering beam from his unbandaged eye, began his life of willing submission by obeying.

They were married in Mrs. Feilding's sitting-room, she and Mr. Feilding the only witnesses; at least, such was the intention of the pair. But just before the conclusion of the ceremony, Dr. Crapoe came in.

"I always said some woman would take you in, Pete, you lucky dog, you!" he remarked. "But I didn't think it would be Sally."

And he shook his sides over his joke.

Pete drew himself up with dignity, and turned to Mr. Feilding.

"What's the damage, parson?" he asked, putting his hand to his waistcoat pocket.

"I hope I've done no damage," was the smiling

reply. "But if you mean fee—nothing! I am under too great obligation to you and Sally to think of accepting one."

"Well, I'll make you as good a pair o' shoes as you can get in New Bedford," replied the grateful Pete.

"An' Mis' Feildin' shall have the first settin' of eggs from my old cropple-crown," added Sally.

And tucking Pete under her arm, the two, now one, departed.

## CHAPTER XV.

All effort to prevent the division of the Surplus Revenue proved vain. The astute lawyer—it was Lawyer Beale—retained by the opposite party found a way out of the difficulty made by the injunction, and the thousand dollars were divided, a large proportion of those opposed to the division at once paying their share into the town treasury for a perpetual fund.

And Major Carpenter had won. Was he satisfied? In reality nothing gives less satisfaction than a success of that kind. And so long as Mr. Feilding remained in Byfield even that success was incomplete. The Major hated him. And every time he chanced upon him that hatred deepened. For it is a paradox that it is not the man who suffers from the evil deed who hates the doer, it is the doer, who never forgives the man he has injured.

The Major's thoughts, during the weeks succeeding his successful campaign, dwelt much upon plans for ousting Mr. Feilding altogether.

He was revolving these in his mind one day as he drove along that sequestered cross-road leading by the Palmer sawmill. It was an effulgent midsummer's day. The banks of the brown brook that filtered through the dense green wood

on either hand were ablaze with the blood-red cardinal flower. Across the deep blue sky trooped flocks of cumuli. The air was sweet and nimble. It was a day upon which one is grateful for the mere fact of existence.

Absorbed in his thoughts, the Major grew oblivious to all things else including his reins, and suddenly his horse stumbled over a hole in the rough road, and fell. He was a spirited horse, and at once began to kick and struggle to regain his feet. The Major was helpless to avert the impending catastrophe. To get out of or into his wagon had of late become a matter of time and effort, through the stiffness of his knees induced by rheumatism. Before he could get out his horse would be up and off, dragging after him a fragmentary wagon, to which the Major might or might not be able to cling, and he would inevitably be thrown at the last.

As he sat helpless, these possibilities flashing through his mind, a young girl darted over the fence from out the wood, sat promptly down on the brute's head, and spread her petticoats well over it.

"Now get out as quick as you can while I hold him down," she said.

The Major obeyed, his hands trembling, the purple of his face deepening, his blue eyes starting from their sockets. For he had instantly recognized the young girl coming so pat for his deliverance. It is true he had never met her face to



face since the encounter across Raven Brook, which we chronicled in an earlier chapter. Their social lines, so far as either had any, fell in places far apart. The Major rarely went anywhere now, except to the houses where his adherents lived. And Delight seldom went from home, for she was happiest with Mammy, as Mammy was with her. There was a wonderful bond of love between these two. And the farm was a place of busy activity now, with Phœbe come to her own again, and Abram at the fore, and Tommy now developed into the more manly "Tom," to drop in daily at vacation times, with the prospect of having him in Byfield for good and all when he should settle as assistant to Dr. Crapoe.

So the two had never met in this interim of years.

The Major unbuckled straps and loosened girth and whiffletree, and all being in readiness, Delight sprang up and stood well off, reins in hand, while the horse scrambled to his feet and shook himself. Nothing was broken, and with nimble fingers she reharnessed, for she knew how to harness as well as to do most kinds of farm work. She could yoke the oxen to a load of hay, and take them through a pair of bars as well as a man could.

"And there ain't another gal in Plymouth County could dew that," said Abram, justly proud of her accomplishments.

His pride in her almost equaled that of Phœbe.

He never wearied of reciting her achievements. Of how she fell into the clay-pits, while reaching out for a water-lily, and emerged half-drowned, and dripping, but, true grit, clutching the water-lily, and gasping:

"I'se dot it, Abram; I'se dot it!" and only five years old!

And that memorable first meeting with a bumble-bee, when she came in with swollen lip, but grit still, and said:

"I see such a sw-sweet itty bird, Mammy, an' I caught it, an' I kissed it, an' it bit me!"

Of such exploits, Abram had exceeding store, and sang of Delight, as Homer of Achilles, to whomsoever would listen. And she prattled to him, just as she was prattling now to Major Carpenter about the horse, the harness, the perils of the fall, and how lucky she came up in the very nick of time; for, tenderly compassionate, he was so lame; in short, all that enchanting small talk that lies—or did lie, in those unsophisticated days—so near the tongue of fifteen.

And all the time the Major spake no word. Neither did he speak when he drove off, but looked at her with his blue eyes starting.

"Such a funny man, Mammy," she said, when detailing her adventure to Phœbe.

Her resemblance to Nannie had not lessened as she grew older. It often startled Mr. Feilding to see how like she was, and he wondered that his mother, with all her acuteness, never remarked it.

But it was not alone her resemblance to Nannie that so agitated the Major. That might have only angered him. But it was that, as he looked at her, the slim young girl, with candid eyes and frank speech, the present receded and the past came back, a past which knew nothing of Nannie.

He saw another, like and yet unlike, in grace and vernal bloom surpassing Delight as a lily surpasses the lowliest field flower, or the woman we love all other women. He saw that other, as he had so often seen her, coming down the path between the tiger lilies, radiant, virginal, to meet her lover.

That lover, not a blear-eyed old man—hard, unforgiving, revengeful, but a gallant youth—erect, fearless, shrinking from no man's eye; full of generous impulses, ready to believe good of all, and most of her upon whose faith he would have staked heaven itself.

Had that faith failed him because she had found one worthier of her love—none could be entirely worthy—it might not have gone so hard with him. But to sell herself to one thrice her years for gold, her virginal purity at so much in dollars and cents, and to do it willingly, without pressure. That was the value, then, that woman-kind set upon what should be above all price? For, to him, she stood for all womanhood.

God! how he had loved her; how he loved her yet, that radiant spectre of the past, now long years in her grave; for her enjoyment of her

dear-bought riches had been brief. What if he had overrated her loveliness and truth? What if, to the unprejudiced common eye, she had been merely a pretty girl, like dozens of others, too wise to wed a poor man when she could catch a rich one? To him she was the guiding star of his destiny, and when she hid herself from him, small wonder was it that he strayed into foul mire and among fatal rocks.

For years his life is not to be told. And now, in this brief moment, he had gone behind all that evil phantasmagoria. He was again his real self, the generous, high-spirited boy, the pattern yet unmarred on which his Maker had planned the perfect man. He lived and loved again in her presence.

The dimple in her cheek, her rounded throat, her delicate ears, her slim waist, the curve of her slender wrist, the turn of her ankle, her springing step—he counted them all over, as he had counted them scores of times in that past. It is thus that the phantoms of vanished years return at some supreme epoch in life; or, it may be, when Death is about to lay his icy hand upon us.

The Major drove away with that vision still before him. It seemed to beckon smilingly as in the dear old days. He drove slowly. Jo Sears, meeting him and noting his flushed face and staring eyes, wondered what deviltry he was hatching now. He had had one of his "spells" that morning, and Tyly was waiting appre-

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hensively his return. She felt the tremor that announced that he had driven into the yard, and braced herself for the coming bootjack. But he came in quietly and went directly to the sitting-room. She waited as long as she dared, and then ventured in to ask what he would have for supper. He replied absently, and with speech so gentle she crept away wondering. But when she went to tell him the table was spread, he lay upon the floor in a fit and breathing stertorously.

Dr. Crapoe was summoned in haste. He pronounced the attack apoplexy. It was severe, and the Major was very near the end of his tether. He probably would not live the night out, and would never regain consciousness. Sally Fish, *née* Pike, was sent for, to be at hand when the dread moment should come. She was watering her flower-border from an old teapot she kept for the purpose when the messenger arrived. She responded promptly, accompanied by Pete, and, to her surprise, found Tyly tearful, agitated, fluttering "like a hen with her head cut off."

Tyly declined all assistance in the sick room. She could do all that was needed, she said. Sally might make herself comfortable in the kitchen, or lie down on the sofy in the Major's sitting-room. If she wanted her she would call her.

"But I've done for him all these years, and I'll do for him to the last. There sha'n't nobody else come a-nigh him," sniffed Tyly, mopping her eyes on a corner of her apron.

"Heavens to Betsy!" ejaculated Sally, safe under cover of Tyly's deafness, "as though I considered it any privilege to nuss the old curmudgeon! You can do it and welcome. An' I do believe some women are jest like dogs. Thrash 'em, an' they'll love y' the better for't. You're a sight to behold, Tyly, with your eyes like beets, and your nose like a turnip, cryin' jest because ole Major Carpenter, who's abused you like a dog day in and day out these twenty year, 's going to die. Lor! some folks think when a pusson is dead, or dying, you mustn't say nothin' but good about 'em. But I say, 'Tell the truth and shame the d——' There ain't a soul but'll be glad to hear the ole Major's gone, if they spoke the truth."

"Eh, what's that you're saying?" asked Tyly, eyeing Sally suspiciously.

"I was jest a-sayin' the ole Major'd be dretfully missed," bawled Sally, lapsing under pressure of sudden temptation from her just declared standard of honest speech. "And that's the truth," she added, *sotto voce*, to Pete. "But more of a miss than a loss, I say."

Neighbors came in to offer assistance. Aunt Chatty came, but finding she could do nothing, went away somewhat heavy at heart at thought of the life, so barren of love and good works, now flickering out.

"But 'tain't for us to judge him," she remarked to Kenelm. "We know what he's done, but we

don't know what he's been tempted to do and ain't done."

"Well, mother, I believe you'd find something good to say even about a—muskeeter!" giving one a vicious slap.

"Well, you can't say it don't give fair warning before it bites, father," rejoined Aunt Chatty, regaining her usual cheerful optimistic frame of mind.

"Now, 'tain't worth while fur you to be broke o' your night's rest, too, Pete," said Sally. "You jest go home an' I'll lop down on the Major's sofy till I'm wanted."

Pete departed, and Tyly went back to her vigil in the sick room. It was a warm, still night. The frogs peeped drowsily, but persistently, and now and then a whip-poor-will whistled. The leaves hung motionless, and not a breath stirred the curtains at the open windows.

The Major's stertorous breathing alone indicated that life still lingered in the body that lay like a log upon the high-post bedstead. There was nothing to be done for him, no medicines to be given; nothing but to watch and wait. Tyly lighted a candle, set it with the brass snuffers and tray, upon a small light-stand, so that its light fell full upon the death-stricken face, casting a grotesque profile of it upon the opposite wall. Now and then she got up and snuffed the candle. Now and then she smoothed the sheet above the struggling chest, and adjusted the coverlet over

the still feet, both prefatory acts, for no movement disarranged either.

Her thoughts of the man, lately so vigorous, now lying there so helpless, were tender thoughts. She had no reproaches for the past. He had treated her more brutally than he would have allowed himself to treat his horse, but she did not remember it against him now. She only wished there was something she could do for him. She was full of self-reproaches that she had done no more for him in the past. She would like to say, "Forgive me, that I have done so little."

The clock in the sitting-room struck one. Its deep, bell-like tone reverberated through the silent house. Tyly got up and went to the window. The fireflies were thick above the meadow, and there was a play of lightning in the southwest. Tyly was afraid of lightning. When a tempest was impending, she always took to a feather bed—having heard that feathers were a non-conductor—and, burying her head in pillows, saw and heard nothing. But tonight she felt no fear. She watched it for some moments, and when she turned back, she met the Major's eyes fixed upon her—open, clear, rational. She hurried to the bedside and bent over him. He tried to speak, but he had passed beyond the limits of speech.

"What is it, poor soul?" asked Tyly. And again he made a great but vain effort to speak.

Then the power she had acquired through her



long and almost total deafness—to interpret a speaker's wishes by the expression of his face—came to her aid. The Major looked at her, and then at some object across the room. Her eyes followed his, and fell upon an old oak chest that stood against the wall, and in which he kept papers.

"Is it the chist?" she asked.

The eyes said "Yes."

She went to it, and looking inquiringly at him, made as though she would lift the lid.

"Yes," said the eyes again.

His keys were in his trousers pockets. She took them out, tried till she found the right one, and unlocked it. Then she lifted and held up first one article and then another. To each the disappointed eyes said "No." She lifted out a small box, and held it up by the brass handle in the lid. The eyes lighted up. It was locked, but the key was in it. She brought it to the bedside, turned the key and laid back the lid. The eyes grew eager. The box was full of papers. She lifted one. Was that it? "No." A second, a third—"Ay, that's it!" The eyes grew luminous, eager, imploring. They turned toward the candle. Tyly caught their meaning. Others in her place might have been scrupulous; might have questioned whether the Major was sufficiently clear in his mind to know what he wanted; whether in destroying a written paper under such circumstances, she might not make herself liable

to some heavy punishment. But Tyly did not hesitate. She had but one thought—so far as she was able, to scrupulously do the will of her dying master.

She brought candle and stand nearer the bedside. She held the paper—it was the thick bluish paper used in legal documents—within an inch of the candle flame.


“Yes,” and “quick,” said the eager eyes.

She put it to the flame. It caught. For a moment she held it, and then, hurrying to the fireplace, dropped it upon the hearth. The eyes watched it till nothing was left but a thin crisp mass which, at a touch of Tyly's hand, crumbled into black-gray ashes.

Tyly replaced the box in the chest, relocked it, and restored the bunch of keys to the trousers pocket.

“Is there anything else?” she asked, bending over the Major.

“Nothing,” said the eyes, but they turned kindly and gratefully upon her as she drew her chair close to the bedside, and sat down, to again watch and wait. It was not for long. She had time to note that all color had faded from the bright, blue eyes; to say what she had been wanting to say, “Forgive,” to receive the answering look, sad, remorseful, but tender, and then the eyelids fell, never again to uncloze. The stertorous breathing grew fainter and fainter, and as morning dawned, and the sun rose upon a




world beautiful and renovated by the tempest that had passed unheeded alike by Tyly and by the deafened ears and blinded eyes of the dying man, Major Carpenter went to his own place.

## CHAPTER XVI.

There was no will. Lawyer Beale, as Major Carpenter's business man, came over and asserted positively there was one, for he had drawn it up; but the closest search failed to bring it to light. The old oak chest, the box within it, the Major's desk in his sitting-room, every possible receptacle for a will was searched, but none was forthcoming.

Lawyer Beale grew agitated, warm, and at last angry. He was local secretary of the Society for the Regeneration of the Heathen, before mentioned, and was justly indignant that it should be defrauded of its handsome legacy merely because the will could not be found. Though a more personal element probably colored his feeling—deep regret that he should fail of the very pretty sum named in the will as his, "a slight recognition of services for which money could never be a full equivalent," said the paragraph wherein the bequest was made. He grew so angry, and so far forgot himself, as to intimate to Mr. Feilding that somebody had fraudulently meddled with it. He spoke of Tyly with suspicion.

Mr. Feilding replied that no one in Byfield could have any possible interest in the destruction



of a will of Major Carpenter, and the lawyer at last left the house, breathing anything but blessings on his late client who had played him so scurvy a trick.

Not until after his final departure, did Tyly tell Mr. Feilding of the burning of the paper. Through all the search for the will, she had kept her own counsel. Mr. Feilding listened, and gave, for him, an unusual demonstration of feeling, in a low and prolonged whistle. So the lawyer was right after all, and there had been a will. For there was no question in Mr. Feilding's mind as to the nature of the paper Tyly had burned. It was the will. He spent no time speculating upon its contents. He cared nothing about them. He was only interested in the fact that if the Major had died without leaving one, his property was Nannie's, if she were living; and if not, her child's. And now it was his evident duty to spare no pains to learn if she were living, and where.

He did wonder somewhat what had caused the Major, in the few moments of consciousness vouchsafed him, to have his will burned. It was Mr. Feilding's general belief that as a man lived so he died. He had small faith in death-bed conversions. He had found that in the few rare cases where death unexpectedly relaxed its grip upon the repentant sinner, he went back like the proverbial sow to her mire as soon as he got well. And why should the Major have made so incon-

sistent an end as that indicated by his revoking the fixed purpose of a long series of years?

Delight had told Mr. Feilding of the fall of the Major's horse, and her going to his rescue. "Such a funny man, daddy. He stared and never spoke a word, which, you know, is bad manners. I didn't know but he was angry, though he didn't look exactly angry. He looked at me as if he saw somebody else, and not me."

As she said this, she looked so like Nannie, Mr. Feilding was not surprised that the sight of her, and knowing who she was, had so agitated the Major. And it pleased him to reflect that, after all, his last thoughts of Nannie must have been fatherly thoughts. For though he was ignorant of the details of the will, it could not have been destroyed with any thought of injuring her, but the contrary, as she was the Major's only heir.

During the search for the will, a hidden compartment had come to light in the Major's desk, one of those that are the delight of lovers of antique furniture and of tale-spinners casting about for plots—a small, narrow recess revealed by a spring. In it lay a faded little old miniature of a young girl in blue, which Lawyer Beale tossed contemptuously one side, and Mr. Feilding had picked up absently. He examined it more closely after hearing Delight's narrative. It was not a work of art. Sketchily done, the hair pale gold, eyes blue, cheeks cherry, and a small,

insipid mouth in a pose as though it had just said "Prunes and prisms." On the back was engraved "C. L. to E. C.," with date. Major Carpenter's Christian name was Edwin. The date was that of his young manhood.

Mr. Feilding recalled how in that memorable interview after Delight's baptism, the Major had cursed all womankind for "a damned deceitful lot who'd make you think black was white and white was black, till you found 'em out," and his own wonder through what experience the Major had acquired his knowledge. Here, in this miniature, he held, perhaps, a clew to the solution of that speech and of much else in Major Carpenter's life.

Having himself been baptized in the holy flame, Mr. Feilding was a believer in Love as one of the mightiest forces, if not the mightiest, that sway the destiny of man. And, looking at the faded little miniature in his hand, he was conscious of a fellow-feeling for the Major, such as he had never before experienced.

Meantime, speculation was rife on the subject of the Major's funeral. What minister would be called upon to attend?

Universalism was just then at ebb tide financially, and the meeting-house was shut. It was just as well, for it was also haying time, and men's thoughts, as was right and proper, were occupied with secular themes. Winter, when there was little else to do, was the time to attend to the concerns of the soul. But the meeting-

house shut up, and the nearest minister of that persuasion twelve miles distant, and by one of the sandiest roads in that sandy district, what was to be done? The minister summoned, who was to pay his fee? For it was not to be expected that he would find both his horse and himself. Impecunious Universalism hesitated to make that summons.

"Darn it all! Let Tyly give him a dinner. That's good enough pay for a buryin'. Ministers git off mighty easy any way, jest preachin' Sundays an' doin' nothin' all the rest o' the week." Thus spake Sam Carson with his usual impetuosity.

"Tyly might send him a sperrib o' one o' them fat hogs o' the Majur's. They're goin' to be killed right off, I heard say," remarked a second haymaker.

They were nooning on the fence in the shade at the north of Jo Sears' barn.

"When my wife's nephew's cousin Mary Ann died over t' Tarkiln, her husban' wouldn't hear to havin' nobody but a Second Advent, an' they had to send fifteen miles for one. He come an' did the thing handsome; sent her right slap t' heaven, an' Ad'niram gave him a ham at pig-killin'. Ad'niram's a liberal kind o' man."

"You might as well spare your breath guess-in'," said Jo Sears. "Tyly 'll probably fix it up. She's the one to do it, and she'll have Mr. Feilding."



"Feildin' won't do it. He's a grudge ag'in the Major for that Surplus Revenue business," hastily retorted Sam, losing his balance in his warmth and tumbling off the fence backwards.

"Do it!" retorted Jo, picking up Sam. "He'd bury the whole kit o' you Surplus Revenue fellers, an' be glad o' the job."

This to Sam was a fresh point of view, and he contemplated it in silence for some moments, while the rest smoked, speechless. Then Jo took out his pipe and spoke again:

"Did you ever go blackberryin' in the winter, Sam?" he asked.

"Blackberryin' in the winter!" ejaculated Sam, struck with the irrelevancy of the question to the subject in hand. "Of course not. There ain't no blackberries in winter."

"A nigger funeral, I mean, Sam," explained Jo, placidly.

Tyly did settle the matter, and with her there was no question as to the fit person to say the last words over the Major. And despite the fact that it was haying, the house was crowded at the hour of service.

From time immemorial the orthodox funerals had been conducted by Leander Wiswell, a well-to-do shoemaker, with histrionic tastes. He it was who arranged where each mourner was to sit; who announced that the moment had arrived to view the remains; who marshaled the procession of inquisitive spectators through the parlor

and by the coffin to their final exit at the front door. And he it was who called aloud the name of each mourner and his place in the funeral procession, marching himself at the tail of it, and laying down his duties only at the grave, after the final dismissal of the bearers.

On this occasion the mourners were few. In fact, all attention was concentrated on Tyly, who alone could truly be designated as such, for the funeral was scandalously dry-eyed.

But the skill of a general is shown, not so much in the marshaling of a well-equipped force, as in the successful carrying-on of a campaign with limited numbers and a deficient commissariat, and never did Leander shine more resplendently in his chosen office than on this occasion. To say that he made the most of Tyly, is to say but little. He amplified her. He made her play the part of a dozen *dramatis personæ*. He himself escorted her, as chief of the dozen, to the carry-all provided, a carry-all that might have been made for this special service, so unspeakably dismal was it, with its black canvas curtains closely buttoned down, its two-inch window at the back, and its outlook upon the hearse in front.

With a view to doing honor to the Major, the large delegation from Sodom, which had hovered on the outskirts of the funeral, not venturing into the house, lest its ears should be made to burn some scorching orthodox sentiment—these fell into line at the end of the procession with every

description of ramshackle wagon and horse—such only, I believe, as a remote New England district, where everybody, whatever his means, must own a conveyance of some sort, can possibly produce.

Jo Sears served as one of the bearers.

"Gentlemen," said the histrionic shoemaker, with a majestic wave of his hand, and turning to the bearers, as the first shovelful of earth fell on the coffin, "gentlemen, you are now at liberty to disperse."

"Disperse, ye rebels!" said Jo, *sotto voce*, reminiscent of a picture in the history book of his boyhood, of Pitcairn at Lexington.

And so, with a jest, the earth was heaped above the dead man.


Which is sadder, to see one go down to his grave in the full tide of life and honor, loving and beloved, or to follow thither one full of years but not of honor, who has come a starveling from life's varied feast, leaving behind no kindly thoughts as legacy?

Once, in a Scotch Highland village, I saw a physician borne to his grave on the shoulders of men who knew and loved him. The pipes played "Lochabar no More," and around were the everlasting hills of God. And it is thus, methinks, that, when his time shall come, one would wish to be borne, on the hearts of those that love him, and to the sweet and solemn harmony of a life of holy thoughts and good deeds set in God's eternal purpose.

Byfield, unlike this page, indulged in small sentiment on the occasion. A few paused with Aunt Chatty to cast a bit of rue upon that lonely grave, but the majority hastened on to the contemplation of the "property."

It was soon known that there was no will, and that fact called up anew the memory of Nannie and her total disappearance. It was remembered that occasional letters had come for a year after her flight, which the Major after carefully scrutinizing on the outside, declined to take out, and they had been forwarded to the Dead Letter Office. The postmaster had the forethought to show one of these to someone familiar with Nannie's handwriting, and so settled beyond doubt that they were hers. But with every effort on his part and that of the frequenters of the store, he had been unable to make out the postmark. The writing was execrable—this was before the days of the postoffice die—and the postmaster remarked, with a sense of being defrauded of one of the most valuable of his perquisites, that wherever the letters came from it was evident the schoolmaster was greatly needed there.

So there was not even that slight peg upon which to hang speculation, and the conclusion was finally reached that, in default of an heir, the property would go to relatives somewhere in the mythical Down East, who, as they had never expected it, would be just as well off without it.



I am not sure that the maggot was not hatched in a shallow brain or two, including Sam Carson's, that with proper management the property might be brought to share the fate of the Surplus Revenue, and be divided among the voters. But the Major was not alive to electioneer the project, and the maggot died in the grub state.

## CHAPTER XVII.

It was a pleasant afternoon, and Aunt Chatty took her knitting work, and stepped over to sit awhile with Phoebe. The doors of the gray old house stood wide open, and the nimble south wind frisked gaily through, now and then blowing out the curtains at the sitting-room windows, and Phoebe's cap strings, straight and taut as a ship's flag and pennants in a spanking breeze.

Delight was off fishing for pickerel in Monponsett Pond with Aunt Chatty's Tom, who was home for vacation, and had come across with his rod and lines, preceding his grandmother.

Delight's sewing work, dropped in a hurry, lay on the table and chairs, with contents of work-basket half in and half out, and snips all about on the striped home-made carpet.

Phoebe looked at these, smiling placidly.

"I remember the time when I couldn't bear to see a single snip on the floor without picking on't right up," she said. "I don't believe I ever told you, Aunt Chatty, about that time before Delight could talk plain. I'd jest swept up my kitchen floor one day, when she come in with some clover-tops and white weeds she'd been picking, and strowed 'em all up an' down from one end to

the other. And when I come in, I said, 'What a dirty floor! it looks dreadful.' And she jest put her little hands together a few minutes and looked it all over, and then, says she, 'It looks pitty to me, Mammy.' And ever sence I've loved to see the little creatur's clutter about. Clean clutter; she don't make dirty clutter."

A pause, during which both knit silently, while a bumble-bee boomed in at one of the windows.

"And it learned me a lesson, too, that things look dif'rent to dif'rent folks, and I mustn't expect everybody to see jest as I do."

Another pause, during which the bumble-bee sought and found a nosegay of phlox on the polished iron fire-frame, with its bright brasses.

Again Phœbe spoke.

"That child fetched a blessing into this house when she come. I can't hardly believe sometimes I'm the same person I was when I found her setting on that rug that day."

Aunt Chatty said nothing. In fact, Phœbe, as she spoke, dropped her knitting and leaned back in her chair with her eyes shut, as though expecting no reply. And another and longer silence followed, during which the bumble-bee packed his honeybag, and Aunt Chatty reflected on the wonder-working ways of Providence, who, above the field He has plowed and harrowed, causes the abundant crops to spring, and the birds to build their nests and sing. But she was not prepared for Phœbe's next remark.

"I wonder what's become o' poor Nannie Carpenter."

Not only the words, but the tone, startled her, it was so full of tender regret. She fairly gasped as she dropped her knitting. But Phoebe retook hers as she went on.

"I've always been grateful to you, Aunt Chatty, that you've never spoke of the past, and I've hoped that you sensed that I was. But you needn't be so keerful any more. I've thought it all over a good many times, and especially sence the old Major died. And whatever—whatever," It was apparent here that she spoke with some effort, "whatever Walter did, Nannie wa'n't to blame. Sech a young thing! no older'n little Blossom. And if I'd been dif'rent, things might not have happened jest as they did. If I'd been more yielding in my disposition, and not so set in my way, I might 'a' seen, or they might 'a' told me, and—but, there 'tain't worth while talking about what might 'a' been. It's done and gone, and it's better to trust. I don't know what that child ain't learned me. There was that day she got off into the mire, and I couldn't get to her, and I jest pushed out a board, and says, 'Come right t' Mammy.' It looked dreadful resky to look at, but, lor! she trotted over with her little hands out, jest as if 'twas a floor, and 'Here I is, Mammy,' says she, and I ketched her up all covered with mud. If I'd 'a' trusted like her, I needn't 'a' wallered in the mire so long."



Here a tear fell among Aunt Chatty's shining needles, and I fancy, that if we could have got at her feeling just then, we might have understood in some measure that of the Angels of Heaven over a repentant and returning prodigal.

Phoebe went on. "There's a hymn that's been a sight o' comfort to me. Mr. Feilding learnt it to little Blossom. It's a very old hymn, he says, and must have comforted a sight of other folks. Blossom sings it 'most every night. She calls it 'Mammy's hymn.' She's a sweet voice, Blossom has. Now that hymn goes to the pith. It says that we love Him, jest as Scriptur' does, because He fust loved us. Only it kind of explains and spreads it out more. We don't love Him, it says, jest—'for the sake o' winning heaven and of escaping hell.' And I can't help thinking, Aunt Chatty, that nobody ever did love and trust Him for them reasons, though ministers preach as if we'd ought to. I sometimes think if I'd been learnt dif'rent about them things—but, there! 'tain't worth while to think what might 'a' been. And Mr. Feilding don't preach that way so much. I sometimes mistrust he's passed through some deep experience that's learned him dif'rent.

"But my father—and he was a good man, Aunt Chatty—was always a-talking about the wrath o' God, and how the main p'int was to escape that wrath. He 'n' Uncle Zadoc would argue upon 't of an evening by the hour together, and when I'd

go to bed, I'd be so scairt I'd hide under the bed-clothes, trembling and thinking of that dreadful eye of God, and that I couldn't get away from it, no matter where I hid; and wondering if I was one o' the elect, and thinking what a dreadful thing it was never to know whether you's elected or no, till 'twas too late. I suffered sights in my mind in that way, and nat'rally when the storm burst over me, instead o' running for shelter to Him, I got away as fur as I could. But it's dif'rent now. And I've come to feel that it's the blesseddest thing that I can't get away from His eye. Little Blossom's learnt me that. For I never could bring myself to talk to her in that way. No; I say God loves His creatur's better than a father or mother loves their child'en. He says Himself He's our Father. And I couldn't be wroth with little Blossom whatever she might do. I'd grieve, for I couldn't a-bear to see her going wrong. And I've no manner o' doubt He grieves. And that's the reason I've never gone back, Aunt Chatty, and took up my Church relations. I couldn't say that I believed them ha'sh doctrines, and I don't railly suppose I ever did, only I thought I did, and they were printed in the Church covenant book. I couldn't tell little Blossom I believed 'em; I want her to love and not to be afeared, and then whatever comes she's something to hold to."

"Lor, Phœbe," interrupted Aunt Chatty, warmly, "you jest go right back and take up your

Church membership ag'in, and say nothing about it to nobody but Mr. Feilding. He'll understand how you feel. He's an understandin' man in them things. These deep subjicks ain't for sech as you and me, Phœbe. I think sometimes they're a kind o' recreation provided for ministers and pious folks that ain't got much to do, but jest to spekilate about election and everlastin' reprobation. We, that's got our families to look after and other folks that need us, and to fight from morning to night ag'in our own sinful propensities, ain't got the time for spekilatin'. All we can do is jest to love God first of all, and then our neighbors as ourselves. And He'll make allowances for the rest. He knows."

"You always do know the right and comforting thing to say, Aunt Chatty. But there! I mustn't talk any more about myself. I hear Tommy and Blossom a-coming. I can always hear her voice when she's coming across the medder. 'Tain't a loud voice, but it's penetrating. Something like a bird's. And she and Tommy'll want the pickerel for supper."

And rolling up her knitting work she hastened into the kitchen to kindle the fire; and while Tommy cleaned the fish, and Phœbe fried them, and Delight set the table, Aunt Chatty communed with herself in the sitting-room, now fragrant in the cool of the day with the sweet smell of the rowan Abram had been cutting.

After their guests had eaten and departed, and

the last chore had been done, Delight, who Phœbe had observed was unusually silent, coaxed her to sit in the front door, which looked to the west, sitting herself on a lower step so as to bring her head on a level with Phœbe's knees. The after-glow flushed the sky to the zenith, touching the fleecy eastern clouds with pink.

As it faded, Delight spoke.

"Mammy," she said, but drooping her head shyly.

And again, after a moment's silence, "Mammy."

"Well?" said Phœbe, laying her thin, wrinkled hand on the bonnie head.

"Mammy!" a third time.

"Well, little Blossom, shall I guess what it is?"

"Oh, no!" replied Delight, looking hastily up.

"I want to tell you, Mammy. Tommy—Tommy——"

"I know, little Blossom, without any telling. Do you think I've been blind all this time?" Phœbe spoke sadly.

"And you won't mind, Mammy, will you? I sha'n't ever go away and leave you. I told Tommy so, and he said I needn't. And I said I shouldn't whether he said I needn't or not," shaking her head saucily. "And then he laughed, and said he should have to leave his grandmother. And I said that was different. And 'tis, Mammy, for I'm all you've got, ain't I?"

The way in which the thin, wrinkled hand stroked the bonnie head spoke volumes.

"And it won't be for a good long while yet, Mammy," she went on cheerily. "Tommy was for telling you himself, but I said no, I'd tell. I knew you'd like that best. And Tommy said 'All right.' Tommy is good, Mammy. He'll be good to you," and she looked up tenderly wistful.

"Yes," responded Phœbe, heartily. "He's his grandmother's own boy, and I couldn't say more in his praise."

The twilight drew on, and Delight said:

"Do tell me again, Mammy, about finding me on the rug. I never do get tired of hearing it. Dear old Rats!" glancing toward a white rose bush in the corner of the front yard, under which was a small but clearly defined mound, with a pink conch shell at either end. "How I wish Rats could have lived always! Do you remember how he got up and rubbed against me just before he died? Just as if he wanted to say good-bye. And when I cried, Tommy said he knew there must be a heaven for cats. And daddy said nobody could say there wasn't, for nobody knew any more about that than they did about other things they said were true."

And Phœbe went over, as she had done many times before, the story of the Coming of Little Blossom. And Delight listened with her head against Phœbe's knee, and her smooth young hand clasping the wrinkled one.

Verily, the Eastern story-teller is not the only one that delighteth to spin his yarn, nor the Orientalist the only one that delighteth to listen. We are a story-telling and story-loving race, we that inhabit this round ball.

"And now," said Phœbe, "sing Mammy's hymn." And Delight sang:

"My God, I love Thee; not because  
I hope for heaven thereby,  
Nor yet because who love Thee not  
Are lost eternally.

"Thou, O my Jesus, Thou did'st me  
Upon the cross embrace;  
For me did'st bear the nails and spear  
And manifest disgrace,

"And griefs and torments numberless,  
And sweat of agony;  
Yea, death itself; and all for me,  
Who was Thine enemy.

"Then why, O blessed Jesu Christ,  
Should I not love Thee well?  
Not for the sake of winning Heaven,  
Nor of escaping hell;

"Not for the hope of gaining aught,  
Not seeking a reward;  
But as Thyself hast lovèd me,  
O ever-loving Lord,

"So would I love Thee, dearest Lord,  
And in Thy praise would sing,  
Solely because Thou art my God  
And my most loving King."


And Jo Sears, crossing by the mill path, and hearing, leaned upon the fence and listened to the sacred words borne through the night air on the pure young voice.

"I've been to the best prayer meetin' I've attended this many a day," he said to his wife when she asked what had kept him so long.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

The Judge of Probate for Plymouth County was a college classmate and friend of Mr. Feilding. He was about to give himself a holiday after many years of application to the duties of his office, during which his migrations, though exceeding those of the good Vicar of Wakefield, "from the blue bed to the brown," had been within narrow limits. A quarterly drive in his sulky to the county town, a very occasional trip to New Bedford or Boston on the Middlebury stage—these had been the sum of them. Neither should these come under the category of holidays, as they had been taken primarily in the interest of business.

Now, having made up his mind to a journey of pure pleasure, he meditated a long flight. He would first of all visit New York, that great and growing metropolis. Thence by easy stages to Philadelphia to see for himself that Cradle of American Liberty—Independence Hall. Then by way of Baltimore, rumors of whose transcendent beauties had reached him, to Washington. Every American citizen should, at some period in his life, make an effort to visit this great capital of a great country. A detour would bring him to Mt. Vernon, hallowed by association with





that greatest of men, ancient or modern, George Washington. He would then cross the Blue Ridge into Tennessee to Monticello, to pay his tribute to the manes of that other great man, second only to Washington, and considered by many as on a level with him—the illustrious Thomas Jefferson. It had been one of the dreams of his life to visit Monticello and make the personal acquaintance of Jefferson. Once he had come near making that long journey with a friend, now dead. He still retained the letter in which that friend briefly described his visit. As he dwelt upon the details of his proposed journey, he drew out the letter from a mass of old correspondence, and re-read it.

“Charlottesville,

“September 12, 1824.

“(Monday).

“Have been spending a couple of days with Mr. Jefferson at Monticello very delightfully. I was received hospitably, and entertained politely. Mr. Jefferson is now eighty-two years of age, a tall, slender man, with gray hair and a freckled face. His dress is a blue coat with yellow buttons, a buff vest, a pair of corduroy pantaloons of the old bottle-green color, a pair of mixed cotton hose, white and blue, and black slippers with the heels up. He talks easily and freely, and upon all subjects—morals, politics, religion, science, literature and the arts. He is zealously devoted to the interests of education in this State, and has succeeded in getting a most magnificent establishment of buildings in this

vicinity. His mind exercises all its functions perfectly, excepting memory, which always fails at his age. He walks but little, while he rides on horseback daily in pleasant weather. He used to receive 1,200 letters annually, but now has only 600, and the answers to these, being about two a day, trouble him considerably, as he is obliged to have them copied. He never dictates to an amanuensis, but sketches a rough draft, and employs his nieces to transcribe. He meddles little with politics, though I think he inclines to the election of Mr. Crawford. He dislikes the tariff, and probably has little complacency toward its advocates.

"His family consists of Mr. and Mrs. Randolph, who are his son-in-law and his daughter, and of the children, male and female, born of these two. Mr. William Short is at present with the family, and has been for two weeks. This is the gentleman whom Mr. Jefferson nominated once as minister to Russia, but he was not accepted by the senate. Mr. Randolph is taciturn and eccentric, but sensible. Mrs. Randolph is not loquacious, but converses well whenever she does it at all. Ellen Randolph, the eldest daughter, is one of the most interesting females I have ever known. She is extremely well educated, and has perfectly good manners. She is an admirer of Byron's poetry, but a detester of his profligacy. Mr. Short is an accomplished man of fortune, but hates labor, and is devoted to elegant sensations. Mr. Jefferson and myself discussed the interests of education till we were both tired, but our views of universities agree very well and remarkably. Monticello is 600 feet above the level of the river that flows at its feet. The view from it is very commanding, and wants

nothing but water to make it perfect. It overlooks the University, which is an academized village, and surveys an immense extent of territory, including the bold outlines of the Blue Ridge. The rooms are filled with paintings, engravings, busts, statues, casts, medallions and natural curiosities. Some of the paintings are from the old masters, and the sculptures are from Italian chisels.

"Mr. Jefferson is undoubtedly what the world has pronounced him to be, a very great man, one of the first geniuses of the age. What he has done in this vicinity ought to immortalize him with the rising generation."

He laid the letter aside with a sigh. To see Monticello deprived of its creator and lord would be like viewing the picked carcass of a golden eagle. Still he would go. Thence he would return across Kentucky, and through Ohio, renewing acquaintance in that State with relatives who had emigrated from Massachusetts some years before. While making the final arrangements for his journey, Mr. Feilding called to consult him in regard to Major Carpenter's property.

The Judge was pretty well acquainted with the private history of almost every family in the county, and with the skeleton in its closet. He was a man of keen sympathies, and people brought their grievances to him as well as their wills, and he was liberal of his councils, helping them in their legal difficulties without fee. He knew all about the flight of Nannie Carpenter, and listened with interest to Mr. Feilding.

"I have not the slightest doubt that Delight is Nannie's child," said Mr. Feilding in conclusion.

"But the legal proof, my dear fellow. We can do nothing without that," replied the Judge.

"I do not expect anything can be done till we do get at that. All I want is time. And more and more I am convinced, as I think it over, that her father was mistaken in his belief that she was not married. She probably thought she was not. Emery, for some purpose of his own, made her think so. And I do not believe she is living. At least, I cannot think if she were that she would have let all these years pass without seeing her child," said Mr. Feilding.

"It is strange she should have left her child at Phœbe's," remarked the Judge.

He called the greater part of his clients by their Christian names.

"It was like her," said Mr. Feilding. "She was of a tender spirit, touched to fine issues. And I can understand how, when she came to reflect upon it, the deception practiced upon Phœbe must have troubled her. And womanlike—or, rather, Nannie-like"—and he smiled sadly—"she brought her most precious thing and gave it to Phœbe for reparation."

The Judge looked at him sympathizingly.

"Well, for two old bachelors, we know the sex pretty well. I'll do all I can. I'll give you time and anything else in my power." And he appointed Mr. Feilding trustee of Major Carpen-

ter's property till such time as his daughter was found, or her fate ascertained beyond doubt.

Some months after, Mr. Feilding received a full letter from him detailing his journey, of which is here transcribed the brief portion necessary to the development of this story:

“ \* \* \* I have been spending three days with the Mortons, at —, Ohio, relatives of mine, who emigrated in 18—; a thriving town with several churches. The Mortons attend the First Presbyterian, and as I stayed over the Sabbath, I attended public worship with them. Their leading member was pointed out to me, a man noted as much for his piety as for his extraordinary success in business. He is said to have already accumulated one hundred thousand dollars, and lives in the handsomest and best-appointed mansion in the town. Ten years ago he married the daughter of a leading citizen, and has a family of lusty boys and girls.

“You may wonder at my writing at length concerning a man in no way very remarkable, and to whom, as an entire stranger, you must be indifferent. But I once saw Walter Emery, and as I never forget a face, certainly not one so remarkably handsome as his, I was at once struck with the strong resemblance of this man to Emery—so struck, in fact, that in observing him I quite lost the thread of the excellent discourse to which I was listening.

“I am almost certain the man is Emery. I have made cautious inquiries of Mr. Morton concerning him, what part of the East he came from, his antecedents, etc., etc. But my host knows little of him. It is not so much the custom here

to ask who a man is, as what he is. And this man's record since he came here has been irreproachable. He is fervent in his religious exercises, is public spirited, gives liberally to benevolent projects, is exemplary in all his business transactions. I have already made such arrangements for my continued journey that I cannot prolong my stay, otherwise I would do so, and find some pretense for a personal interview with this Mr. Horton, as he calls himself.

"And now, my dear Feilding, why not take a holiday, and come and see for yourself whether this man be Emery or not? The journey and this new country with all its vast possibilities will refresh you, and tend to rub off some of that superfluous moss which the unrolling stone is sure to gather, to its detriment. Already I renew my own youth here. I will say again, I am almost positive this man is Emery. If so, Nannie's death may have antedated his present marriage, and so no harm can come to his innocent family by proving that first marriage. And I am inclined to think with you there was a marriage. And if successful in its object, your journey will reinstate Nannie and give Delight her grandfather's property. \* \* \* Another straw of evidence: My host has just informed me that Mr. Horton has been making inquiries concerning me and the probable length of my stay. He invited him to sup with us to-night, but he declined on plea of a pressing engagement. This looks like deliberate avoidance, as everyone here is eager to make acquaintance with anyone coming from the East. It would appear that he recognizes me. \* \* \*

"Humphrey Wood."

## CHAPTER XIX.

Mr. Feilding at once acted upon the suggestion made in the Judge's letter, and before his people had time to recover their breaths, which had been quite taken away by the announcement of his intended journey, he was fairly on his way, making the journey as swiftly as was possible by stage-coach, canal boat and emigrant wagon. After dark, on the last day, the stage stopped to pick up a man, who took the vacant seat inside. As he entered, he said "Good-evening," and his voice to Mr. Feilding's ear had a familiar ring. He at once addressed one of the passengers, and a conversation ensued upon the usual topics of common interest, the weather, the state of the roads, and the news brought by the coach from the East.

There is nothing that carries conviction like a voice. We may be mistaken in the identity of a face. The resemblance may be only a fancied one, but a voice rarely misleads, and heard after a period of silence on its part, however long, has the power to call up former scenes and associations as the face, even when little changed, cannot. In that respect it exercises the same magic as a strain of music once familiar, but long unheard, and which falls again on the ear. It

sets to dancing the figures of the past, as the music of the hand-organ seems to animate the marionettes on its mimic stage.

And as Mr. Feilding listened to the voice of the stranger, the conviction dawned and grew that he was listening to Walter Emery. The stage stopped, and the driver came to the door.

"We're at your place, Mr. Horton," he said.

And then Mr. Feilding knew that Judge Wood had been correct in his surmise. He himself was set down at Mr. Morton's, who, with characteristic Western hospitality, had insisted that his house should be his hotel.

He had at once to determine on his course of action. For it would not be possible to keep himself long unseen by Emery, and recognition was sure to follow. Twenty years had made little change in Mr. Feilding, save to streak his hair with gray.

It was difficult to determine when and how to approach Emery—at his place of business, his house, or upon the street. If Mr. Feilding had been sure of anything, sure of Nannie's marriage, and that she was dead, or had died before the present marriage, the matter would be simple. If, on the contrary, she were still living, and there had been only a desertion on Emery's part, discovery meant ruin to Emery, and he would make a desperate fight against recognition, and, driven to bay, might develop unexpected powers of defense.



On the other hand, if there had been no marriage, to proceed directly against Emery would only bring disgrace upon Nannie's memory; and it would be far better that Delight's parentage should remain unknown, and her grandfather's property go to the mythical Down East relatives, than that a permanent blot should rest upon her. So far as money was concerned, she would not be badly off any way. She would inherit Phœbe's property; and he himself had made a will constituting her, after his mother, his sole heir.

But, above all, he desired to know Nannie's fate. He could never rest until he knew that. And so this middle-aged man, whom people in general regarded as free from the harassing cares of the ordinary family man, tossed and tumbled the night through, revolving measures, and unable to fix upon any definite course of action.

He had arrived on Friday, and early on Saturday morning the minister of the First Presbyterian Church called to ask him to preach for him the next day. He consented. Seen there by Emery, the latter would be forewarned. Should he give him time to be forearmed?

Excusing himself on the plea of a morning walk before resorting to Mr. Morton's place of business, he rambled up and down the streets of the pretty town, still revolving ways and means. He suddenly came to a resolution. The straightforward way was always the best, and without

giving himself time to think, he made straight for the bank, and entering, asked a clerk if he could see Mr. Horton. He was immediately ushered into an inner office, where the banker sat alone.

He rose to greet his visitor, and as he did so, Mr. Feilding was aware by a flicker in his eyes that he had recognized him. His rather florid countenance lost color perceptibly. But he came forward and held out a hand easily.

Good God! It was Walter Emery beyond all doubt. He had grown portly. His Bacchantic locks—Delight's own—were somewhat thinner. The cares of life, or its vices, had planted abundant crowsfeet at the corners of his handsome, smiling eyes. The well-formed mouth with full lips, slightly overfull, was partially hidden by a beard *à la cavalier*, whereas Walter Emery, the younger, had been close-shaven. This altered the contour of the face, which was doubtless his reason for adopting that unusual fashion of wearing the beard. He had copied it from an engraving after Vandyke, together with the fashion of parting the hair in the middle. He was still very handsome. Mr. Feilding acknowledged that to himself in the instant he had at command.

He had, furthermore, acquired a polish of manner, a suavity of expression, that the younger Emery did not possess, and Mr. Feilding recalled, with that perversity with which thoughts the strangest will obtrude, that the wretched mother

who bore him had been wont to say that he had in his veins some of the "best blood" in P—. Was it to that "best blood" that he owed this admirable veneer?

"I am honored, Mr. — eh? Mr. —" he began.

"Feilding. You certainly must know me, Walter Emery," said Mr. Feilding, but not taking the proffered hand.

Emery started perceptibly. His suave manner stiffened. A devil looked out of his handsome eyes. "I—I do not understand you," he said. "I am Mr. Horton."

"You are Walter Emery, who ran away from Byfield, Massachusetts, with Nannie Carpenter, in 18—. And I now find you living with another wife. What became of your first wife, sir?"

"Really, sir, you are assuming a great deal. Or you must be insane." He put his hand to a bell on his table. "You probably are, and you had better retire quietly and at once, or I shall summon a clerk."

"If you wish proof of my sanity, I refer you to Mr. Morton, at whose house I am staying, or to Mr. Hallett, whose pulpit I occupy to-morrow. But come, Emery, it's nonsense to try to deceive me; I know you too well."

"I must again declare, since you prove your sanity, that you are mistaken. Some marked resemblance to the person you mention has deceived you. Such resemblances are not uncom-

mon. I am not exactly the man, as you will find on inquiry, to run away with a girl of the character you name."

Mr. Feilding made a step forward. "Of the character I name!" he repeated, half-choked with passion. He was naturally of a hot temper, of which he had fondly hoped he had got the better long before, for good and all. But he now found out his mistake. Passions may be chained, but they expire only with life, and now and then they clank their fetters to let us know they are there. Had he followed his impulse, he would have knocked Emery down. His fist doubled to do it, but he reined himself in. What did it matter after all what the villain said, so long as he might gain the object for which he had come. "From a hog rooting in its filth, what can you expect but a grunt?" Mr. Feilding felt inclined to thank God for that ancient and wise aphorism.

"I beg pardon," continued Emery, suavely; "I may have touched upon a tender point. You are interested naturally in the young person you name as one of the lambs of your flock. I spoke inadvertently. I have no doubt she was an exemplary young woman. But the best occasionally fall into error."

Mr. Feilding's passion died into contempt. He became as cool as Emery; cooler, for Emery began to show heat.

"I have not come here to quarrel with you, Emery," Mr. Feilding went on; "I have come to

learn where Nannie—where your wife is. Her father is dead, and she is heir to his property. It is necessary that inquiries should be set on foot for her. You were the last of her early fr—acquaintances to know anything of her, therefore I come to you. If you refuse to tell me, I shall have to put the prosecution into other hands. I think you will find it for your interest to be candid with me."

"Really, sir, this is the most singular infatuation on your part. My record here is open to you—to all men. I can truly say it is without blot. And to come here and confront me with this tale of a young woman; to declare I am someone else than myself; to——"

"Judge Wood recognized you, and had his return not been imperative would have called upon you for the same purpose I have—to learn what has become of your wife. He has appointed me trustee of her property," interrupted Mr. Feilding.

"Oh, he did, did he? Curse him! If I'd 'a' known it I'd——" he stopped himself and laughed. "Game's up, Feilding, eh? Stop!" He stepped to the door and opened it. "Can see no one till this gentleman leaves," he said to his clerks; then shut the door and locked it. He drew up a chair for Mr. Feilding, who up to this point had stood, and seated himself in another beside him.

"Now, Feilding," he said in a carefully-lowered

voice, "we'll come to an understanding. Provided I am Walter Emery, as you say, and own it, what then? What is it you want?"

"I want to know what has become of Nannie Carpenter, of your wife," said Mr. Feilding.

"My wife, eh? Well, I s'pose she was." He had laid aside his suave manner, and assumed a jocular air, most offensive. "Though I made her think she wa'n't. Told her the way we were married was illegal, and the little fool believed it. I got rid of her that way. She wouldn't stay with me a day after I'd made her believe that. Got on her high horse and skedaddled, baby and all. And I've never seen or heard from her since."

"And did you never care to know what had become of her and her child?" asked Mr. Feilding.

"Why should I when I got rid of them on purpose? Love in two rooms with a squalling brat isn't what it's cracked up to be. And Nannie never was much to my taste. I'd reckoned on the old man's money. I gave myself a fling after I got rid of her, and before I settled down here, you'll bet, Feilding, saw something of life."

Mr. Feilding controlled himself with an effort, and asked:

"But didn't you make sure of her death before your second marriage?"

"That's the weak point in the case, Feilding," replied Emery, "and that's why, when I found you were in earnest, I caved in. If you choose

to do it, you can ruin me here, turn my children into bastards—which, after all, is what I am—and my wife—. Well, I don't know whether Nannie's alive or dead. If she's alive, she'll turn up some day, and she can have the Major's property, and if you don't split on me it'll be all right. She needn't know, and my other wife needn't know, and things'll settle themselves. Hail Columby, and ho-pop-o-lo-rum! It all depends on you, Feilding. I'll give you any sum you've a mind to name to keep dark. I'm rich, a darned sight richer"—lapsing into the inelegancies of the Byfield shoeshop—"than folks guess. You might endow something with it. Parsons like to do that—keeps their memory green. A professorship in your favorite theological school; the 'Feilding Chair' of something or other'd sound well. If Nannie's dead she won't turn up, of course, and it'll be all right. But, anyway, the money's yours, and I'll have the check made out now if you'll name the amount."

"What do you take me for? Because you are lost to all sense of honor and decency, don't think all men are." And Mr. Feilding felt himself growing hot. The fetters of his chained temper rattled ominously.

"Oh! well, money's money, and a darned handy thing to have. But if you don't want it you can leave it. Only keep cool, and don't work yourself up into a fever; it don't pay. But I say, Feilding, don't split on me. Think o' my other

poor wife. To tell the truth, I shouldn't mind so much myself. I could take to pastures new and find good feed. This confounded respectability is dull business. But—well—I do have a little feeling for the poor woman and all those children. I've got nine innocents, Feilding, a 'quiver full,' as the Psalmist says. Well, I've answered your questions so far. What more do you want? I'm not a Witch of Endor to call up the dead."

"Good heavens, Emery, what are you made of?" ejaculated Mr. Feilding.

"Of the same clay as yourself, parson. We were all fashioned alike of one blood to dwell on all the face of the earth, according to Scriptur', as Phœbe used to say. How is the old gal? Ha, ha! that was a joke. I've often wondered how the old maid took it; she was uncommon sweet on me; but there—all the women are."

Mr. Feilding rose, sickened. He had thought he would tell him about Delight, but no! how could he introduce anything so pure and true into the atmosphere fouled by this man?

"Can you give me the name of the town where you and Nannie were married and the name of the minister?" he asked. It caused him an effort to say this. To couple the two even in thought in the holy bond of marriage was a bitter pain.

"With the greatest pleasure in the world, if you'll give your word not to split on me."

"I've no wish to injure you in any way. My sole object in coming was to find, if possible,



some clew to Nannie. There is only one person to whom I shall mention the result of my visit, and that is Judge Wood. He is the only one who knows why I came. In all probability Nannie is dead, and it is quite as important for you as for me to ascertain that point, and also the date of her death. If that antedates your present marriage, that is then valid."

"All right! then I'll give you the names," said Emery. He rose and sat down by his table, drawing a sheet of paper to him as he spoke.

"I should like to have a statement of your marriage, with date, and properly witnessed," said Mr. Feilding.

"All right!" said Emery again, cheerfully. The lack of trust implied by this request did not disturb him.

He wrote, handed the writing to Mr. Feilding, unlocked the door, called in two clerks, signed and ordered them to sign.

"An agreement between this gentleman, Mr. Feilding, and myself," he explained. "And now you can go."

"Will you add the date when Nannie left you and the age of her child?" And this done, Mr. Feilding got up to go.

At that moment the door opened, and a lady entered. Instantly the jocose, free and easy, vulgar Walter Emery gave place to the courtly, chivalrous Mr. Horton. He came forward.

"I am glad you happened in so opportunely,

my dear Cornelia," he said. "This is an old friend, the Reverend Mr. Feilding, from the East, who preaches for Mr. Hallett tomorrow."

Mrs. Horton was a tall, dignified matronly woman. She replied to her husband with a smile.

"Any old friend of yours, dear Arthur, is doubly welcome. I always regret that I know so few of them." She extended her hand to Mr. Feilding. "I hope you will make a prolonged stay with us, and that we shall have the pleasure of seeing you in our own home. I have just left Mrs. Morton, and she has half promised for you that you will dine with us on Tuesday. You see, Arthur, Mrs. Morton has, in a way, forestalled your introduction."

But Mr. Feilding instantly determined to leave on Tuesday. To dine at the house of Walter Emery, to sit at his table and eat of his salt would be impossible; and he wondered at the fortune, or the fate, that had bestowed upon this man two such women, each so gracious after her kind, as gentle little Nannie Carpenter and this fine specimen of womanhood.

He said "Good-bye" with the cordial regrets of Mrs. Horton that he was not able to dine with them, and the equally cordial hope that they might have the pleasure in the near future of again welcoming him to —.

He left on Tuesday morning. He called, making a day's journey off the direct route at the small Connecticut town named by Emery as the

place of his marriage, saw the entry of that marriage in the church records, and conversed with the now old, white-haired minister who had married them. He remembered them well. "The handsomest pair I ever married," he said. His wife, now dead, and he had often wondered about their after life. She, dear woman, wove many a pretty tale about them. He trusted they had lived happily, and with no more experience of the ills of life than must necessarily fall to the lot of every child of humanity.

Mr. Feilding pushed on. He was impatient to reach home, and set to work prosecuting further inquiries for Nannie. Meanwhile, fate or providence was making that way wide to his feet.

## CHAPTER XX.

As the stage-coach that brought Mr. Feilding home drew up to leave the mail-bag and bait the horses, he saw that something unusual had taken, or was taking, place. A large group of men and women were standing about the store door talking excitedly. Doctor Crapoe was crossing the Green with Aunt Chatty's Tom. Mr. Feilding got out, and seeing him they came up.

"I'm glad you've come, Mr. Feilding," was Doctor Crapoe's greeting.

"What is it? What is the matter?" asked Mr. Feilding.

"The dam at the Palmer Mill has burst, and the water has nearly all run out above the mill. And in the ooze by the gate—half-caught in it, in fact—a body has been found, the body of a woman. We've taken it out, and it's been carried into the hearse-house, and I've set Uncle Zeb to making a coffin. It has been there apparently for years, and there isn't much to identify it. Nobody has ever disappeared from these parts, and nobody can guess who it is, though they're still at it trying to," nodding toward the talking group at the store door. "The only thing that can give any clew is this; this was round the neck."

And he took from his vest pocket what looked like a slender chain of gold, corroded by lying in water. From it hung a small pendant.

At sight of this Mr. Feilding started, and a hand seemed to grip at his heart and stop its pulsations for the moment.

"Let me see it," he said.

He examined it. The clasp was a peculiar one. He thought he recognized it. He looked at it more closely. He traced a sequence of letters on the back. He examined the pendant, wiping it on his coat-sleeve. A tiny ruby was set in it.

"Eh! what is it?" queried the doctor, observing the strange look on Mr. Feilding's face.

"Take it and tell me what you make out on the back of the clasp," said Mr. Feilding, speaking with difficulty.

The doctor brought his spectacles to bear and spelled out "N-a-n-n-i-e." He looked bewildered for an instant, and then cried: "Good God, Feilding, you don't mean it's Nannie Carpenter?"

Mr. Feilding nodded.

"I gave her that chain," he said. "She had a fondness for little personal ornaments, and her father would never indulge her, and I did it to please her. It was on her fourteenth birthday. It's all there—the name, the ruby, and all."

"If you can swear to that, of course that's enough to identify the body. But, good heavens! Who would ever have dreamed it? Poor

little girl! What made her do it, and what's become o' that scamp, Emery?"

Mr. Feilding turned to Tom.

"Will you," he said, "kindly step over to the parsonage, and let my mother know I have come, while I confer with the doctor?"

"And, now, doctor," he said, "I can tell you all I know, and my reasons, aside from this chain, for being positive that it is Nannie."

And he told, with all the detail necessary, of his discovery of Emery, of his interview with him, of his denial of their marriage to Nannie, of her flight from him with her child. The arrival of Delight coincided very nearly with the date given by Emery of that flight.

He then told how he had recognized the child as Nannie's at her baptism, and his subsequent interview with Major Carpenter, in which he had learned that she had come to him, had acknowledged that Emery had thrown her off, and that she was not married to him. Her father had driven her from his door, and that was the last trace he had been able to find of her. But her after course was now made clear. She had left her child at Phœbe's, and in her despair had drowned herself.

There were a few moments of silence, after Mr. Feilding ceased speaking, and then the doctor burst out.

"Good God, Feilding, why are such things allowed? Why should that sweet little girl have

come to such a dreadful end? Such things make a pagan of a man. They make him ask why, if there is a God, He permits such things. Poor little Nannie Carpenter! She's one o' my babies, Feilding. We never had any of our own, but I tell my wife we've a pretty big family after all, for I claim a share in every one I've seen safe into this tough old world. Turned away by her father from his own door! And for the very reason that had ought to made him open it all the wider, because he thought she'd been betrayed and forsaken by a damned brute. Don't mind it, Feilding, I can't help swearing. I wonder how the old reprobate felt when he knocked at heaven's gate, and 'twas banged in his face—as I've no doubt 'twas—and served him right. I'm a charitable man, Feilding. A doctor's profession makes him that, if he's any kind of a man. He sees a deal more of the seamy side of life than most folks, and knows how to make allowances. But my mantle ain't wide enough to cover Major Carpenter and all his works. And it's your sinner that's always hardest on sinners. 'Twas a sinless man that said, 'Neither do I condemn thee.' Lord! if a poor woman goes wrong, how all the prudes, married and single, fall afoul of her. Poor little girl! left her baby, and then went and drowned herself, and we all sleeping soundly in our beds."

During this speech the doctor took off his spectacles and wiped his eyes again and again, and a

tear or two escaping, ran down his plump cheeks and dropped upon his plumper stomach.

But Mr. Feilding's eyes were dry.

When he left the doctor, he did not join the group by the store door, as they hoped he might. He went on to Phœbe's. Phœbe must be told. She must now learn that the child she had cherished all these years was Nannie's and Walter Emery's. How would she take it?

He found her sitting alone, her morning's work done, her pot boiling for dinner, her sewing in her hand. The sun fell cheerfully in at the open door and wide window. A successor to Rats slept upon the settle-box.

Delight was away. She had gone across to the parsonage to tell Mrs. Feilding about the bursting of the dam. How they had heard it give way with a great roar and rush of waters, that flooded the meadows, converting them for a brief time into a shallow lake, and terrifying the cows and Pomp, who had run lowing and whinnying to the barn. Abram had gone to the gris' mill at Tripphammer with corn, and so Delight had fastened up Pomp in his stall, and tied the cows to the stanchions.


Then after the morning's work was done, she had stepped over to tell Mrs. Feilding all about it, for Mrs. Feilding always liked to know all the particulars about things. Had Mr. Feilding not seen her? No! then most likely she had gone on to Aunt Chatty's, who was laid up with a spell o'



rheumatism. Tommy was doctoring her all himself. Doctor Crapoe hadn't been called in. Kenelm said if they wa'n't willing to be killed by Tommy, they needn't expect other folks would be. Kenelm would always have his joke; but Aunt Chatty had all the confidence in the world in Tommy. She said there was one thing, that Tommy wouldn't pretend that he knew what ailed a person when he didn't, or pretend he could cure 'em when he couldn't. He was an honest boy, honest as the daylight.

When Mis' Allen died so sudden over to Sutton, and Tommy was called in, Dr. Weston made out a certifikit telling what she died of, and wanted Tommy to sign it, and Tommy wouldn't. He said he didn't know what she died of, 'twas an obscure case; and Dr. Weston was railly put out, and said if that's the way Tommy was going to do, he'd never have much practice. A doctor must say what ailed folks, even if he didn't know, or they wouldn't like it; and if he didn't know what medicine was good for 'em, he must guess at it. He said doctoring was more'n two-thirds guessing, anyway. Mercy Tinker was nussin' Mis' Allen, and she heard him say it, and told Aunt Chatty.

Yes, Delight must 'a' gone on from the parsonage to Aunt Chatty's, if Mr. Feilding hadn't seen her. She hoped he felt the better for his journey; she'd thought for some time he hadn't been looking well. Mis' Feilding must be glad to get



him safe back again. She hoped she was well. When Delight stepped over yesterday, she was having one o' her spells o' tic doloreaux.

Phœbe had paused several times in the course of these remarks to give Mr. Feilding an opportunity to speak, but he had remained silent. Now he spoke:

"I haven't seen my mother yet. I came straight from the stage here."

He thought this remark might be an opener. As a minister, he had frequently been called upon to "break" unexpected or disastrous news, but never before had he found it so difficult. It was an opener. Phœbe made a movement of surprise, and her eyes looked the "why?" which her tongue did not speak.

Mr. Feilding went on.

"I see you have not heard of the—the discovery, what was found in the pond after the water drained off. They—they found the body of a woman. It had been there for some time—for many years. There wasn't much to identify it. Nobody could guess who it was. There were a great many people at the store talking about it when the stage drove up. Doctor Crapoe has had it carried into the hearse-house, and there'll be an inquest this afternoon. Doctor Crapoe had no idea who it was; but I—I suspected, and there was a chain on the neck which settled who it was beyond doubt."

He paused here, and Phœbe gripped the chair-

arms hard. That subtle something, that electric force which flashes intelligence from mind to mind, when, as in this case, the two are linked by a common and profound interest—this subtle telegraph line suggested—for like that of which it is the prototype, it communicates not by words, but in cipher to be interpreted — this flashed a message she shrunk from deciphering, shrunk as one who rarely receives a telegram does, when he looks at the yellow envelope in his hand, knowing that it holds a message of painful and vital interest; but she did not speak.

"I knew the chain," Mr. Feilding went on. "I gave it to her. It was Nannie Carpenter." He paused, unable to go on.

Phoebe trembled. She shook from head to foot. Mr. Feilding got up from his chair, and went toward her, holding out his hands entreatingly.

"Forgive her!" he said. "Forgive her, Phoebe. She was so young. She didn't know what she was doing."

"Oh, it isn't that! God forgive me! Once I should have been glad to hear what you have been telling. Poor little Nannie!"


Mr. Feilding took her thin, wrinkled hands in his. "Phoebe," he said, "it is sometimes a comfort to know that others have experienced a sorrow like our own, and know how we feel. I loved Nannie. My God, how I loved her, and do love her!"

"And thank Him that you do," replied Phœbe. "I loved Walter Emery; then I hated him; now I wish him no ill. But I don't love him or hate him."

For a few moments the deliberate "tick-tock! tick-tock!" of the tall old clock in the corner alone disturbed the silence. "For ever—never! Never—for ever!"

The sunshine, filtered through the autumn haze, was golden. The air without and within was laden with the rich, fruity smells of the dying year.

Mr. Feilding sat down and went on: "But I have not told you all, Phœbe, though what you have said makes it easier to tell. I have learned when Nannie's death took place, that she thought Emery had deceived her, and there had been a mock marriage—or, rather, an illegal marriage. And she came back to her father's house with her child, and begged to be taken in, and he drove her away. But I have found that there was a proper marriage. I learned that during my visit West. It was to learn Nannie's fate, if I could, that I went there. And I've learned enough to know, with the added proof of the chain I gave her, that the body found today is hers. That—that after she left her father's house she came here to this house, left her child, and then drowned herself. Phœbe, Delight is Nannie's child. She gave her to you. She trusted you for the good woman you are; and in expia-



tion for what she had done, she gave you her most precious treasure."

Phoebe had sunk back in her chair, and the tears were running down her cheeks. "Poor little lamb! If I'd 'a' known, if I'd only 'a' known. And yet there's no knowing what I'd 'a' done. I was hard in them days, and it's more'n likely I'd 'a' turned her away, too. The old man was hard, but 'tain't for me to set in judgment on him. Mr. Feilding," she said, anxiously, "I've heered folks say, Christian folks, that they that kill themselves are lost. They said so when poor Susan Wood went melancholy mad and hung herself. And if 't hadn't 'a' been for the mercy o' God, I should have done it myself. I was tempted, sorely tempted. Poor lamb! every door shut ag'inst her, she thought. Surely, the Lord opened His wide when she run to Him."

"We may be sure of that," replied Mr. Feilding. Such a teacher is personal experience, in which alembic crystallized doctrine melts like icebergs in a tropic sea.

Delight's step was heard.

"She must be told," said Mr. Feilding. "Who shall tell her, you or I?"

"I will tell her," replied Phoebe, eagerly. "Nobody must tell her but me."

Delight came in excited, grieved. She had heard. "Oh, Mammy!—"

"I know," replied Phoebe, quietly. "Mr. Feilding told me. But we won't talk about it

now. After dinner I've got something very particular to tell you."

And after dinner was eaten, the dishes washed, and the kitchen tidied, they went up into the roomy old garret. Here, too, were fruity smells from the pears, apples and quinces spread upon the floor.

"Blossom, there's a chist 'way under the eaves in that dark corner behind them boards and that bed-quilt. I dassay you've never seen it."

"Oh, yes, I have, Mammy. Trust me for knowing everything there is in this garret. Shall I pull it out?"

"Yes, but mind the beam, and don't bump your head agin' it, dearie."

Delight stooped, darted behind the upright boards and the bedquilt, and emerged, shaking the dusty cobwebs from her eyes. She dragged the chest by its iron handle.

"Such a big chest, Mammy, big enough to hide in. I came across it one time after I'd been reading a story in one of daddy's books about a bride that hid in a chest. She lived in an old castle with lots of rooms—a hundred, I should think—and in one room was a beautiful great carved, oak chest. And the bride—she'd only been married a few hours, and had her wedding dress on—she thought she'd hide just for fun, and make her husband look for her. And so she slipped away from the wedding guests and jumped into the big chest, and kept as still

as a mouse, and holding up the lid a little way so as to breathe. But somehow the lid dropped, and it fastened with a spring, and there she was, locked in. I suppose she must have screamed and knocked. But the room was so far away from that where her husband and the rest were, they couldn't hear her. And though they hunted and hunted everywhere, they never found her, and never knew what had become of her. But a hundred years or so after, somebody opened the chest, and there was her skeleton in the wedding clothes. And they knew who it was, for everybody had heard the story of the lost bride. I cried when I read the story, and daddy said it happened hundreds of years ago. But I said that didn't make a mite of difference. 'Twas just as sad as though she was smothered yesterday. Poor thing! I remember when I came across this chest I tried to open it, but it was locked. And"—trying the lid—"it's locked now. Oh, Mammy," lowering her voice and putting on a pretty air of alarm, do you suppose there's a skeleton bride in this one?"

Although by this time Phoebe was well acquainted with Delight's powers of fantasy, or what she called her "make believe," she was manifestly shaken by this question. Under the circumstances it was such a strange question to ask. For if the chest did not hold a skeleton bride, it held something very near akin to it.

"What are you a-thinkin' of, Blossom?" she ejaculated. "You shouldn't read them kind o' things. I a'most wish sometimes you hadn't had the run o' Mr. Feilding's libr'y. But here's the key."

With an effort Delight turned the rusted key in the rusted lock.

"Take the things out," said Phœbe; and Delight lifted one by one and laid on Phœbe's lap a gray silk gown, a torn lace tucker, a pair of slim gray shoes, knitted thread stockings of a shell pattern, a high wrought shell comb, a pair of side combs, a necklace of round gold beads, and linen garments, yellow with age and damp. Everything, except the combs and necklace, exhaled a musty odor, and they were green with mold.

"Whose were they, Mammy?" asked Delight, wonderingly.

"Mine, dearie," replied Phœbe. "My weddin' things."

"Yours, Mammy? Why——" and stopped.

Phœbe was lifting the things one by one and looking at them.

"Yes, I wa'n't ever a bride, but these are my weddin' things. It's a long story, little Blossom, and that's what I come up here to tell. To show you the things and tell you the story. I was a good deal older than him, and I suppose he was drawn on to think of me on account o' my property. And I railly can't think now how I come



to suppose he thought o' me for any other reason. But I was foolish enough to believe he did, and I suppose I was raily infatuated. But 'tain't worth while dwelling on that," and a faint color stole into her thin, old cheeks. "I was jest fool enough to think a young and handsome man could keer for me. And I—well, I'd a-crawled in the dust for him, and I give up all my money to him, and trusted him.

And the weddin' day was set, and we'd talked over everything, jest what we'd do with the farm, for that would be his, too. And if I'd 'a' been a queen and had a kingdom, I suppose I'd 'a' give him that."

[Phœbe knew naught of that Queen Mary called "Bloody Mary." She whom Tennyson makes to say that never woman "meant so well or fared so ill in this disastrous world." She, too, was elderly and homely—if we may credit her portraits, and I think we may—and infatuated with a younger and handsome man, on whose head she would have set the English crown had not her malcontent subjects rebelled. Truly, history is perpetually repeating itself!]

"I was a fool. But women are foolish. It's nat'ral for 'em to want somebody to lean on. They're made so. And all this time he was planning, I suppose—for sech things don't spring up in a night—he was planning to marry somebody else. And—I don't know whether anybody has ever spoke to you about Nannie Carpenter?"

tentatively, and Delight, who was sitting on a trunk by her side, said:

"No."

"She was a pritty girl. I never see a prittier. Her color was fresh, and she was as sweet-tempered as she was pritty. 'Twas like a streak o' sunshine when she come in. And she use' to come a good deal. I was fond of her, and things wa'n't very pleasant to home with the old Major. She'd help me wash the dishes, and pare and slice apples to dry, and gather peaches, and fetch in the clothes and sprinkle and fold 'em—anything that I happened to be doing. She was a handy creatur', though no handier than you be, dearie. And Walter, that was his name—I can see now he was gen'rally here when she was, and it was nat'ral that two young things should keer for each other. I see it now, and might then if I hadn't been blinded by my own folly. Though I fear from some things I've heered that he didn't keer for her as he'd ought, and was thinking more of what'd fall to her from her father, and so got tired of her after a spell. Well, the weddin' day come. 'Twas a bright day, and I dressed early, for Walter said he should come early; and these were the things I wore, Blossom. And though everything after is dreadful confused, I remember *that* as though 'twas yesterday, and jest how I looked in the glass; though it don't seem me but somebody else I'm looking back upon. And the folks I'd invited come, and Mr. Feilding, but Walter

never come. And bimeby a boy come to say he'd run away with Nannie Carpenter. And 'twas after that things become confused, and I can't rightly remember many things. But my will was strong, and I wouldn't yield, and shut myself away from folks, all but Aunt Chatty. And I was a-wandering in very dark ways when you was sent to me, little Blossom."

Delight tenderly stroked the thin yellow hair.

"I've never spoke to you about these things, dearie," Phœbe went on, "because there was no need on't. But something has took place today that makes it necessary. Nobody ever heered anything about Nannie Carpenter from the day she run away. The ole Major was dreadful angry, and cut her off from his property. But it seems that about the time you come, little Blossom, she come back to him, and wanted to be took in. Walter had been unkind to her, and—but I needn't go into pertic'lars. It's jest as well not to know all the wickedness there is in the world at your tender age, dearie. But she was unhappy, and thought he didn't want her any more, and she come back, and her father drove her from his door, her and her little baby. Then she remembered me, and how she use' to come here and be happy, I s'pose; and she come, and found the door locked. Though I doubt if she'd 'a' ventur'd in if I'd been to home, and I'm afeard—yes, I'm afeard—I should 'a' been cruel to her. But she knew where the key was always

put, for she'd unlocked the door many a time when she'd come, and I had stepped out. And she took it out and unlocked the door, and come in, and left her baby on the rug, playing with Rats, dearie; and then, poor little girl! she went and drowned herself in the mill-pond, and there they found her this day. Mr. Feilding come and told me; and he was going to tell you, but I said nobody but me must tell you; for you are Nannie Carpenter's little baby, and my own best blessin'."

As she stopped, she put an arm around Delight.

"Poor Mammy! poor little mother!" said Delight, softly, and returning the caress. Then she burst into tears. "And all these years she's been there under the white water lilies, and we so happy, Mammy."

Phoebe swept the wedding things one side upon the floor, drew Delight upon her lap, and soothed her as she did on the day she found her.

"There, there!" and she swayed to and fro in the rickety old rocker in which she had seated herself preparatory to the unlocking of the chest, till Delight's sobs ceased, and she put up an April face.

"Perhaps, Mammy, that was what made Major Carpenter act so funny that day his horse fell down. Do you think he knew? But, of course, he must. Do, I look like Nannie?"

"Yes, come to look at you, you do. I 'most

wonder I never noticed it before. And you've got some of her little ways o' doing things, too."

For a few moments there was silence, and then Delight asked:

"Shall I put the things back into the chest, Mammy?"

"No, no! we won't have 'em put back ag'in," replied Phœbe, rousing herself, and speaking with unwonted briskness. "We won't have any more harboring of old troubles. Here's the high tortus-shell comb," picking it up. "That was mother's, and a handsome comb 'tis. I'll put that by. And the necklace you shall have, dearie. There's only a few folks that have got them necklaces o' round gold beads. Mis' Palmer and Aunt Chatty and two or three others. This was my great-grandmother Church's. And we'll make a bed-quilt out o' the skirt o' the gown. I've got another laid by that'll do to go with it. You'll like to have a silk bed-quilt, dearie. And as to the linen," picking that up in its turn, "it's too fur gone for anything but rags; and linen rags are useful about a house. I'll tear 'em up into strips and squares at odd times, and hem 'em. The squares'll do to wipe glasses and silver on. The ruffin's as tender as cobwebs," pulling at it. "Lor! the hours I spent over that ruffin, hemstitched, too! I knit them stockings myself, and I want you to have 'em. For that's the only pair I ever knit o' that shell pattern. It's a sight o' work. And them shoes—railly, they're

pritty fur gone, too, with damp and mildew, and I'll jest cut them up into strips; they'll come handy to nail up the grape-vine. And as to the lace, some on't seems to be torn, but what's good you'll be glad on, dearie. Lace is always handy, and this is real pillar lace. It's yaller. But some folks dip their lace into coffee to make it yaller. I never did. I like white stuff white. And we'll fill up the chist with them permains. They'll be ripe about Thanksgivin' time. They're an excellent good apple, and they'll jest about fill it, and they'll meller better shut up."

Phoebe made these common-sense, economic dispositions with zealous warmth. In doing so, she heaped the final gravel upon the grave of her dead past—i. e., of that portion of it of which there was to be no resurrection. For as a great modern poet sings:

"There shall never be one lost good! what was shall live as before,

The evil is null, is nought, is silence, implying sound;  
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more,

On earth the broken arc, in heaven a perfect round."

Phoebe felt this, though, not being a poet, she necessarily would have expressed her feeling in different words. She would have said, perhaps, that it was best to trust, for in the end all things work together for good. For had not that black wave of evil that threatened to engulf her life cast at her feet and into her arms a pearl of measure-

less value, to be worn henceforth with hallelujahs? Nevermore would she ask why and wherefore. Her times were in His hands. She had felt that to the heart's core, as pondering with tenderness over Nannie's fateful story, she had gently swayed to and fro with Delight clasped in her arms.

Afterward, at frequent times, they talked cheerfully together, concerning Nannie, and by Delight this young girl, so little older than herself when the waters of death closed over her, came to be regarded more as a sister than a mother. She loved to think of her as coming familiarly to the dear old farmhouse that had proved so friendly a shelter to them both; and thus talking of her, she became a daily presence in the house.

After the inquest there was a quiet burial in the old "Burying-ground." Three only stood about the grave as the coffin was lowered—Mr. Feilding, Doctor Crapoe and Doctor Tom, as Aunt Chatty's Tommy was now coming to be called. A prayer was spoken, for in New England that un-Christian sentiment never obtained that banished the poor suicide from the companionship of his kind in death, and forbade him the rites of Christian burial. Over him, as over his fellow-sinners, were recited the sacred words, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

Each of those who stood there was pledged to reveal no more of Nannie's sad story to the public ear than was necessary. To none was Emery's

later life to be spoken of. So far as Byfield was concerned, he was to be regarded as dead. Those who loved Nannie were only too ready to dis sever the two in their thoughts. Doctor Crapoe said he should not mention anything about it to his wife. It was a myth of the excellent doctor that his wife was the leaky vessel, though she was generally esteemed as over-discreet—"close-mouthed." But that the doctor could keep a secret was proved by the fact that he kept this one.

Doctor Tom did not mention the existence of her father to Delight. He took her to the grave, and she wept again, but on his shoulder, tears that, like summer rain, refresh and vivify. And from that time Phœbe was aware that, though blithe as ever, Delight was "steadier"—"improved" she would have said if she could have brought herself to acknowledge that so faultless a creature was susceptible of improvement.



## CONCLUSION.

Major Carpenter's property proved to be "handsome," and Delight was an undoubted heiress. With one house in hand—Major Carpenter's—and two in the bush—Phœbe's and Kenelm's—Byfield was of the opinion that the marriage of the pair should no longer be delayed.

Folks always liked a doctor to be married. And Doctor Crapoe was ready to give his practice into Doctor Tom's hands. He had said so; and was no more to be knocked up o' nights, or broken in upon when in the thick of a novel by his beloved Walter Scott, to assuage the imaginary pains of the Widder Brown, who lived six miles to the east'ard, or smooth the as-yet-unaccomplished, though often anticipated, exit of Amasa Bryant, who lived six miles to the west'ard, and who by some fatality or depravity of circumstances, always made a simultaneous demand for his services.

The doctor was an owl in his nocturnal habits, while Mrs. Crapoe, like the domestic hen, her prototype, went early to bed. And forty years of matrimony had brought the two no nearer in that respect. The doctor still read "The Heart of Mid-Lothian" or the "Antiquary" far into the small hours, to be summoned at last, and obliged

to drive off without having had a wink of sleep. He read the same edition as Mr. Feilding. In fact, they had bought the whole set of Waverley novels together, halving the volumes and exchanging as they saw fit.

"And now," said the doctor, after imparting his intention to retire from business to Mrs. Crapoe, "now I mean to begin and read every novel of Walter Scott's once more before I die."

And Mrs. Crapoe, who had never read but one story book, "Alonzo and Melissa," a highly-seasoned work unknown to this realistic generation, and from the perusal of which she had formed an opinion unfavorable to that branch of literature, sighed. She wished he had said the Bible. Not that he neglected that. Mrs. Crapoe was of the belief that only one other person in Byfield surpassed the doctor in his knowledge of that sacred book, and that was Mr. Feilding. But still—novels, and at his age!

She, good woman, stitching together bedquilt after bedquilt of five hundred or more pieces each, felt that novel-reading was a sad if not sinful waste of time. But she loved the doctor as he did her, with an abiding affection, and would have gladly supplied from her own privy purse any gap in the sequence of his favorite books, as he never failed to make requisition at each house he visited for pieces for her quilts. Death, doubtless, would find them at last—she with an unfinished quilt on her hands, he in the

middle of "Ivanhoe" or "Old Mortality." Though it is not of death we are to write in this chapter. Full three lustres yet remained to the completion of these honored lives, rounding them as the apse rounds the perfect cathedral.

It was a lavish June day, a right royal "marritch" day, and the ceremony had not long been completed. The doors of the old gray farmhouse stood wide open, a choir of robins, thrushes and linnets supplied the wedding march, and the newly wedded pair, stepping out, walked slowly down the gravel path between the flowering pinks and columbines to the front-yard gate, stopping by the way to smell the white and damask roses.

Two young girls also came down the steps, but followed no further. Subdued out of their usual chatter, they stood silently contemplating the pair, thrilled with thoughts of the heavenly mystery of marriage. There were the two walking on together, never more to part. Tom opened the gate, and shut it after Delight had passed through. Always was he thus to attend upon her footsteps. He took her hand. Thus they were to go always, hand in hand. How wonderful! how beautiful!

Delight, in her bridal white, moved over the green meadow grass, looking like—a swan? No; most awkward of created things is a swan on solid ground. A dove? Nay, a dove waddles. Phœbe, following them with her eyes at the open

window, would have found nothing worthy to be compared with Delight—but just herself! “Good as good,” “White as white,” says the Warwickshireman when he wants a superlative.

The two passed on. They spoke by the way. Of their future, the watching girls would have guessed. But no, it was of their past. When we are deliciously happy, we do not look forward, we look back. In the light of the radiant present we review the steps by which we have attained. Do you remember this? Do you remember that? they asked. No, Delight did not remember how she ran to Tommy that first morning, and clasped him about, and, when he snatched her up, buried her hands in his “fire-red hair.”

But “fire-red!” “No, no,” she said, tenderly remonstrative. His hair, now a rich warm brown, could never have been “fire-red.” She was willing to admit there was a red light in it here and there, which only served to deepen the warm brown. But “red, fire-red,” persisted Doctor Tom, and she rumbled it with her disengaged hand to punish him.

They entered the cool shade of the wood by Raven Brook. Did Tommy remember their voyages to Mother Goose Land? *Didn't* he?

“Tell it again, little Blossom,” he said.

And Delight began, “An’ we sails an’ sails,” and so on to the maid in the “darden.”

Then they ran laughing away, and still with joined hands. Tom called Delight a pussy cat,



and she said he was a great big owl, and she would eat him.

Foolish, happy pair! But it is good, supremely good, at times to be foolish and happy.

And Delight had not forgotten Class-day at Brown, and Franklin Adams saying, "By Jove, what a pretty gal!" And then, when he found out who she was, immediately firing off one of his execrable puns. "What element in nature is most pleasing to man?" "Why De light, ob course!" And Tom was at first inclined to be angry, only Adams *was* such a fool! And then somebody, not to be outdone by Adams, had remarked that this had been the most "Delightful Class-day" on record.

Then Delight changed the subject, and asked when Tommy first began to think about her. "The first minute I caught sight of you chasing those chickens," says he, promptly. And Delight said she could beat him there, for she had thought of him ever since she could remember!

At which Doctor Tom took a far leap ahead. "We'll grow old together like grandpa and grandma," he said. "They're lovers yet. Sometimes I go in and find them sitting hand in hand in the firelight."

And so they rambled on in this most charming of wedding journeys, worth scores of the Niagara trips and European scrambles of our latter day. Enriched, too, with the grace of brevity, for they were due at home at tea-time.

Sally was stepping about in company with Phœbe and Tyly, preparing the tea. For Aunt Chatty, who had borne so bravely disappointment after disappointment, was at last quite overcome with this consummation of a long-cherished hope, and was ordered by Doctor Crapoe to keep still, though she would fain have assisted at the ordering of the feast. She had been in a dissolving state all through the ceremony, and when Kenelm, who had been anxiously watching her, brought a footstool and put it under her feet to express his sympathy, she fairly broke down. She rallied quickly, however. "I declare for 't, Kenelm, how foolish I be! But I ain't felt well lately," apologetically to the company at large. "And my narves have kind o' given out. There! there! I feel better now," to Mrs. Feilding and Mrs. Crapoe, who simultaneously recommended valerian. "I'm a silly old woman. But I am so glad!" and she nearly went off again.

Tyly also wept at intervals, and wished the Major could 'a' lived to 'a' seen this day. At which Sally grunted, but with unwonted considerateness refrained from speech, though Tyly, in her tremulous agitation, was scattering crumbs and bits of chicken all the way from the but'ry to the tea-table. Sally only hoped the just wedded pair would be as comf'table as she and Pete. She'd no idee the marriage state was so desirable till she tried it.

And Pete was stammering out much the same



sentiment to Abram, who had taken him out to the woodhouse for a smoke.

"Th-th-there's nothin' like havin' yer own house and y'r own woman in it, Abram," said he. "Th-th' Lord knew what He was about when He created woman. 'Tain't good for man to be alone,' sez He, an' m-m-man'd b'en a poor enough crittur without her."

"Yas," assented Abram, "I'm the last man t' dispute that. But there's a difference in succumstances. Naouw I shall hev a hum as long's Miss Tilson lives, and artewards, if I'm so unfortunite as to outlive her. 'Delight and him couldn't git on no way without Abram,' Doctor Tom says. And Delight, Lor'! she's just countin' on nussin' me in my ole age. Little creatur'! Did I ever tell y', Pete?"

And off he started on the tale of her achievements. Ordinarily Pete would have said testily:

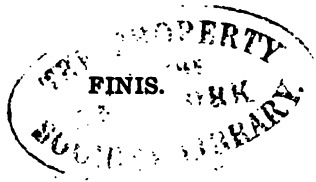
"Now, Abram, I've heard that old story fifty times at the smallest reckonin'." But now he listened placidly. Who on this day could indulge in ill-natured or even contradictory remarks?

During the marriage service, Phoebe had worn a *Nunc Dimittis* expression of countenance, observing which, Mr. Feilding said to her, smiling—after the bride had been duly kissed and blessed:

"It is better to live and see the glory of Israel, Phoebe."

Phœbe only partially understood him, but she knew he meant to cheer, and smiled in response.

As to Mr. Feilding himself, he wore that day and ever after under the ample white neckcloth, which formed at that time so conspicuous a part of the livery of ministerial service, a slender gold chain with ruby pendant, corroded with lying long in water. And no one but Phœbe ever knew why Mr. Feilding had never married.





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